

THE RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS  
OF BHASANI'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

The Religious and Philosophical Basis of Bhasani's Political Leadership.

Abid S. Bahar, Ph. D.

Concordia University, 2003

Bhasani was born in 1885, two decades after the famous Indian revolt of 1857. Following the revolt, in the tumultuous political arena of South Asia many notable politicians emerged. One of these was Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, best known as Bhasani. As a religious seer-wise person and holy person, with a number of loyal followers and devotees, he had two over-lapping groups of followers--those who responded to him as a *pir* (a religious mystic) and those who responded to his political positions.

Political observers and academicians in the South Asian subcontinent have repeatedly claimed that Bhasani was a "Communist," a "fundamentalist," and that he had "no direction in politics." This research examines the socio-political contexts of Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh within which Bhasani worked, and discovers that, contrary to the claims, Bhasani used a model of Islamic liberal ideas. The research findings suggest that Bhasani's religious perspective is present in several ways: a) in his sense of calling - as a kind of mystic; b) in his vision of a human community not rent by divisions and oppression; c) in the Islamic rhetoric of his discourse; and d), in his sense of being called upon to respond to contemporary exigencies. This latter feature seems especially important. He acted in ways that were principled and consistent with *rubūbiyah*: the Sufi-inspired views of the unity of being, simple living, and serving humanity as a religious duty. As a political leader, his lifestyle of a Bengali peasant was not a result of his destiny, but of his choice and his use of religion in politics suggests that he was a complex figure.

## PREFACE

My interest in Bhasani stems from my thoughts about Bangladesh, the country of my birth which I have permanently left. However, from a distance, I have remained in touch with people through my intellectual pursuits and sought to learn more about it. I was especially involved in the understanding of the social forces, reform movements, and socio-economic developments that changed the politics of the region. An inquiry into the life of Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani as a dissertation topic, I recognized matched my interests.

Bhasani was a political leader of Bengal who with other leaders of his time shaped the politics of the subcontinent in general and Bangladesh in particular. Among other things, Bhasani played an important part in the liberation war of Bangladesh in the 1970's in which I was also directly involved. Ironically, I never knowingly attended his political meetings although personally, I was aware of his activities through the media. In 1967, once in my teenage years in Bangladesh, I was on my way to *Kanungopara* College in Chittagong to meet a family member, when I saw Bhasani at a close range. I saw him speaking from a podium by the side of a rural road. I still remember that I was a curious passerby drawn to the thunderous noise coming from the roadside gathering where I saw him, then already an aged man, speaking to the rural peasants. From his outfit and appearance, he looked like a rural Bengali peasant. He was talking with a very angry face, with his jaw jutting out. I remember that before this encounter, I did not know who he was. I inquired about the name of this person. I would have forgotten both his name and this incident had I not remembered the very angry look in his face and his



teeth, that seemed almost about to bite something or somebody. That was my first impression of a political leader who was very angry about something.

Before I began my research, like many other Bengalis, I remained indifferent to his political appeals, though acknowledging that he was one of the leading catalysts for change in the region.<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 1988, I went to Bangladesh to begin exploratory research on Bhasani. By now, Bhasani was dead and the dust had started to settle, and some research had been done on him. My proficiency in Bengali, the language Bhasani used in his communications and my familiarity with Bengali culture made my job easier. During the 1970's my job as a research fellow and Sociology teacher in Bangladesh teaching subjects such as the Social History of Bengal at the University of Chittagong must have also served me with a useful "foil" at this time to work on this topic.<sup>2</sup>

As I began my research in Bangladesh, I started to meet people in Dhaka who worked with Bhasani; I met Nasir Bhasani, Bhasani's son who was a former Minister in the Bangladeshi government. I also met Mostaque Ahmad, the former President of Bangladesh in his famous Aga Masih Lane home. He was unusually apathetic. I expected that not all will be welcoming. I met Jaffer Ahmad, the former Prime Minister and others

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<sup>1</sup> Like many Bengalis of South Asian background, I thought Bhasani would be a "religious reactionary" in politics and at first the topic did not interest me at all. However, as I continued my research, I started to discover him as an interesting religious personality. His life is so intertwined with South Asian history that, doing research on him also helped me to know more about the region and particularly about the social background of Bangladesh history.

<sup>2</sup> In this section of the thesis, among other things, I have outlined in brief the problems I have faced such as contextual (cultural, language proficiency, and the setup), physical (transportation and finance), technical problems (methods/means used for data collection, interpretation and translation, etc.). I have described here my personal story of doing research on Bhasani and how I tackled these problems on this topic.

as well. In the process, I recorded some general oral history about him. Most of my interviewees did not provide much help, but they all informed me that I should go to the Santosh village of Tangail in Bangladesh where Bhasani lived in a hut “that is still there.”

Santosh is about 70 kilometers from Dhaka. I, along with my guide, left for Santosh by bus through quite rugged streets and often had to stand for hours hanging onto the handle from the ceiling in a packed bus, sometimes feeling like I was suspended in mid air. In addition, twice we had to wait and change to another bus. As it was becoming quite hectic, the feeling of discomfort and fatigue soon started to show. Perhaps I had gotten too used to Canadian comfort. Finally after an agonizing 4 hours journey, I finally arrived in Santosh. As I approached the town, I looked for the hut but noticed instead from a distance, the top of a huge building with a tomb. My guide said “That is where Bhasani lived.” For a moment, I felt as if my guide was as inept as I was since I was sure that what I was looking at could not be the “hut.” But my guide cleared my confusion saying that it was Bhasani’s newly built mausoleum. They had transformed his graveyard into a mausoleum. I felt disheartened, believing the original hut had been destroyed. As I approached near, I saw many would be his followers visiting his mausoleum. Not far from the mausoleum, I noticed a hut. I thought I had finally found what I was looking for in my exploratory study: the hut where Bhasani lived. To my great satisfaction, I collected some books on him, conducted some quick interviews with his colleagues, took some pictures of the hut and returned to Canada.

As I continued my work in Canada, I realized that I had not gathered enough to finish my dissertation. However, I continued collecting secondary materials and kept up

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contacts with Bhasani's followers in Bangladesh and abroad. During this time many Bhasani followers launched an international campaign to fight against the Indian Farakka dam over the Ganges River. Bhasani in his lifetime initiated the protest march against this project in Bangladesh. It should be noted that the impact of the Farakka dam devastated one quarter of Bangladesh in the south west. As luck would have it, I was asked by some of his followers from New York to take an important leadership position in the international lobbying campaign against the dam. As an environmental issue, I devoted some time to this. Many of the followers believed that I like many of them, were a Bhasani supporter and suggested I also take an important position in Bhasani's National Awami League (NAP) party work which I politely declined at the expense of their displeasure. The more I tried to convince them of my role, the more displeasure it caused them. Many of them are still angry with me and could not understand why, despite my role in the Farakka movement, I declined such a position. In my mind, I was not a Bhasani's NAP party follower but was principally a researcher who also had a chance to work in this environmental cause initiated by Bhasani. Fortunately, before it became a serious issue between us, my fieldwork was already done. Despite the misunderstandings, in the process of this close association, I was able to collect important documents about Bhasani, which otherwise would have been impossible to obtain.

I made a second trip to Bangladesh in June 1995 to renew my contacts, to verify the already formulated hypothesis about the religious basis of Bhasani's political

leadership and to obtain additional information on my topic. I found the second trip more comfortable. I lived in a bungalow in Santosh for a week. I noticed how within about 7 years after my first trip, the place had turned into a small “temple city.” It had become something of a pilgrimage center with the mausoleum and the hut still there as the centerpiece. Contact through Azizur Rahman, the former President of the Bhasani Trust also helped me to procure important documents from Syed Irfanul Bari, the former editor of Bhasani's weekly *Haq Khota*, Mohammed Hossain, an associate of Bhasani and Siddiquir Rahman, a former Bhasani associate and the caretaker of the mausoleum. The Tangail press club, hearing of my presence in the city, interviewed me and published my statement in the local daily *Desh khottha* about our Farakka lobbying activities in the USA and Canada.

I took advantage of the bungalow to complete this “deluxe tour” - this time with my guide Kamal - to learn about Bhasani from family members, Sufi *Sagrits* (disciples) and other close associates. I was also taken inside the hut, by Mr. Siddique, the son-in-law of Bhasani. I had a tour of the huge *darbar hall* (the bungalow style house) made of bamboo where he did *dhikir* (meditation) with his disciples and settled disputes among people. Not far from this was the Bhasani museum where artifacts were kept. In 1996, I briefly traveled to Bangladesh a third time which allowed me to obtain additional documents. In addition to collecting documents, my fieldwork enabled me to experience the social context, particularly the milieu of Santosh which still presents Bhasani's vibrant presence.

I want to thank Azizur Rahman (Atiq Bhai) Additional Secretary of the Government of Bangladesh for making this very difficult job of data collection during my second trip much easier. I must thank my guide Kamal who spent hours of his time just sitting and watching me do my job in Santosh. I also want to thank Syed Irfanul Bari, and Mohammed Hossain, the two great souls dedicated to continuing Bhasani's tradition. I would like to thank both of them for their sincere help.

In order to understand Bhasani's ultimate concerns, his self-understanding is taken into primary consideration. Therefore, I have given importance to Bhasani's own works, statements, and his statements as recorded by scholars, the writings and my interviews done on his Sufi disciples and their expressions of Bhasani's ideas in anecdotal form as illustrative of his "subjective meaning" and the "inner logic" of his actions.<sup>3</sup>

While there are abundant materials on Bhasani, the research is handicapped by the fact that Bhasani never wrote a memoir, nor did he deliberately designate anybody to write a biography of him. In order to circulate his plans, Bhasani would sometimes make leaflets and distribute them, most of which are presumably lost. He did this throughout his life. In agrarian and informal societies like Bengal and Assam, it is normal practice not to keep records. While this is true, my field trips to Bangladesh helped me to collect some rare documents that include Bhasani's speeches, leaflets, and rare books. The rest of the materials collected during these trips were his followers' memoirs, newspapers,

government records on important issues. Whenever transcripts and Bhasani's speeches were found, they were given priority over other documents.

Some important materials on the Pakistan period, published in newspapers, such as the Daily Ittifaq were lost because the offices were set on fire by the Pakistan army.

The house of Bhasani and many of his followers were similarly set on fire during this time, causing great losses of documents and artifacts. To fill in the gaps regarding events or issues I could not understand, I sometimes consulted his associates in Tangail, in Dhaka and in New York. To recap, in order to ensure validity and reliability, I have evaluated sources by cross checking references with other sources. I have tried to avoid articles that were exclusively apologetic or propagandistic as they are often also riddled with theoretical and methodological irregularities.

I am indebted to Professor Sheila McDonough and Professor Frederick Bird for giving me the opportunity to work on this interesting subject; the life of Bhasani as my dissertation topic. As I continued my work, I kept in my mind what Professor McDonough suggested in her book, *Gandhi's Response to Islam*, "In ... History of Religion, we ... consider respect an important element in the attitude researchers should take when approaching religious phenomenon". She adds "The reason [for this] is that an open, non-judgmental attitude is a valuable tool when attempting to comprehend religious meaning. ... Respect from this perspective implies that we are open to the possibility of learning something we did not know before."<sup>4</sup> In approaching Bhasani as a topic, I, as a

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Turner discusses about Weber's methodology in his book *Weber and Islam: A Critical Study* (New York: Roulledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Sheila McDonough, *Gandhi's Response to Islam*, (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld), 1994, p.1

student of religion, tried to internalize this habit. In addition, I have benefited from her guidance in this area of specialization. I thank her very much, especially for her patience for these long years of work.

In my studies and continued research, I have gotten help in the formation and the understanding of the history and philosophy of religion and its use in my thesis from Professor Frederick Bird, the supervisor of the thesis. His patience, friendly approach and efficiency made him a valuable resource person in this department. I tapped his enlightened spirit in his role as a model teacher, a guide and for his numerous other emotional support to me. I am grateful to him.

My hearty thanks to Professor Lynda Clarke, an expert on Islamic mysticism, for accepting with enthusiasm her role as a committee member. Her help allowed me to understand Sufi mysticism and Bhasani's particular use of it in the Bengali context. I owe my gratitude to Professor Orr who helped me to understand the different dimensions of relationship between religion and politics. I also want to thank Professor Miller of Religion department. I am thankful to Dr. Ishwar Modi of Rajstan University in India who also gave me necessary help to understand Bhasani. Eileen, Alim ullah, Atiqur Rahman Salu, Shahidul Islam Talukdar, Nur Mohammed Kazi, Tina and Munit were also inspirational in finishing my thesis.

About 95% of the materials collected for use in this research came from Bengali sources. Only a small percentage of the materials came from Urdu and English sources. I tried to translate these foreign sources into English as faithfully as possible without having the meaning lost. In this translation of materials two Bengali works have been

used more than others particularly in preparing the chronology and in cross-checking references. Syed Maksud's Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, 1994, and Hasan Abdul Quayyum (ed.) Majlum Jananata Mawlana Bhashani, 1988. I thank the authors for their pioneering works.

Financial support to go to Bangladesh for the second trip was provided by Dawson College where I presently teach. I would like to thank the Dawson Teacher's Union (DTU) for its support.

My Ph.D. work on part time basis took many years of research, partly because the sources used had to be translated. Secondly, Bhasani had a political career which spanned many years that I had to understand and analyze. I have thus received much help from many people - many of them are not listed here. I thank all of them.

During the time of this research A.T. M. Hafizullah helped me immensely in the collection of rare documents in Dhaka. I dedicate the thesis in his honor.

My wife Ira and my parents in Bangladesh endured much through this time and have encouraged me to persist and finish this work. I must thank all of them for their inspiration and patience.

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## PART 1: INTRODUCTION

### CHAPTER 1: SOUTH ASIAN ISLAM

Islam was first introduced into India by Arab Muslims in the year 712 A.D. Muhammad bin Qasim, the general of the Muslim army conquered Sind. This was an expansion of territory similar to those being followed in the Middle East and North Africa by the Muslims who were rapidly increasing their influence into those areas.<sup>1</sup> It took centuries for Muslims to establish their rule over the subcontinent. This original settlement in Sind did not expand much. Three centuries later a different foray came from Central Asia through Afghanistan and the Khyber Pass. These Muslims came from a mixture of Turkish, Persian, and other Central Asian nomadic tribes. The leader of this incursion, Mahmud of Ghazna, behaved in a more belligerent and disparaging way towards the Hindus than the earlier conqueror in Sind had done. In the following centuries, many different Muslim leaders came into India by the same path, and established ruling dynasties in North India.<sup>2</sup> The interaction between the Muslim leaders and the Hindu populations varied over time; some rulers, such as Akbar the Moghul ruler of India, attempted to develop harmonious relations between communities, whereas others, such as Aurungzeb, pursued a sterner path of attempting to impose harsher taxes and other restrictive measures on non-Muslim citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> S. M. Ikram, Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan (1858-1951), (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1965), p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Jawharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (New York: Anchor books, 1959), pp.132-150, 162-176.

Islam came through warriors in the north but, in the south, it was introduced by Arab traders, seamen and missionaries.<sup>3</sup> Despite centuries of Muslim rule, South Asia remained largely a Hindu populated region.

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**Table 1: Showing Chronology of Events before Bhasani's birth**

712	Islam was introduced in India by the Arabs in Sind
1757	East India Company defeated Bengal's Muslim ruler Siraj-ud-Daula, and subsequently Muslims lost their dominant position, as the English language and European education were introduced.
1772-1833	Raja Ram Mohan Roy led Hindu religious reform movement in Calcutta.
1782-1840	Haji Shariatullah led anti- British Faraidi movement in rural Bengal.
1837	Persian was replaced by English as the official language of India.
1857	Indian revolt against British East India Company's rule
1866	Deoband Madrssa in Northern India was established.
1872-73	Peasant revolution in Sherajgonj of Pubna district.
1875	Sayyid Ahmed began his pro-British Aligarh movement

Source: Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani (Bengali) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994). Also Library of Congress, conducted by the US Federal Research Division, Country Studies, "Bangladesh", 1857, "A Great Divide in South Asian History,". James Heitzman (eds.) September, 1988, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy>> (May 15, 2003)

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The conversion of many people in Bengal (the eastern most province of South Asia) to Islam seems to have happened gradually, largely as a result of wandering Sufi teachers. In the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, many Sufi orders flourished in India; the Sufis often interacted with the wandering Hindus following Bhakti practices of devotional life. There is a rich literature in many Indian languages reflecting the poetry of

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<sup>3</sup>Anwarul Haq, The Faith Movement of Mawlana Mohammed Ilyas (London: George Allen & Unwin Limited, 1972).

these Sufi and Bhakti devotees.<sup>4</sup> Much devotional literature of this kind exists in Bengali. There are also many shrines in Bengal devoted to the memories of Sufi *pirs*. Some of the famous ones being Rasti Shah, Khan Jahan Ali, Shaikh Sharafuddin Abu Tawamah, Hazrat Shah Jalal, Shah Makhdoom Ruposh, Shaikh Baba Adam Shahid, Shah Sultan Mahisawar, Shah Chand Awliya, Shaikh Alauddin Alaul Haq, Shah Ali Bagdadi, Mohsin Awliya, Baizid Bostami etc.<sup>5</sup> In course of time Bengal unlike many other regions of India demographically turned into a majority Muslim population.

British merchants began coming into India in the sixteenth century. The British East India Company received permission from the Mughal Emperor to begin trading. The city of Calcutta was founded in 1690. On June 23, 1757, Muslim rule came to an end in Bengal when the British East India Company became the ruler by defeating Siraj-ud-Daula, the independent ruler of Bengal in the battle of Plassy. The effects of the company rule were extremely destructive. Bengal was dominated by the British for over two hundred years, and suffered greater impoverishment during the first half of the period as a result of the East India Company rule than did any other part of India. Nehru describes what happened:

Bengal had the first full experience of British rule in India. That rule began with outright plunder, and a land revenue system which extracted the uttermost farthing....The English historians of India, Edward Thompson and G. T. Garrett, tell us the 'a gold-lust unequalled since the hysteria that took hold of the Spaniards of Cortes' and Pizarro's age filled the English mind. Bengal in particular was not to know peace again until she had been bled white'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See for additional discussion on this subject M. Mujeeb, The Indian Muslims (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967)

<sup>5</sup> A View of a Nation, Bangladesh Towards 21<sup>st</sup> century, (Evolution of Medieval Bengal (1204-1757) (Dhaka: Ministry of information, Government of Bangladesh, <<http://www.citechco.net/bangladesh/history.html>> May 15, 2003).

Indeed, the exploitation by “merchants” turned administrators provoked an intense reaction against the Company rule particularly against its Landlease Act known as the Permanent Settlement Act, started in 1793 (also known as British *zamindari* system). Percival Spar says, “Bengal sank from a state of fabled prosperity to rural misery.”<sup>7</sup>

Within about a hundred year East India Company expanded its rule over other parts of India. During this time, there were colonial elite groups and organizations such as Fort Williams College, Asiatic Society of Bengal and Srirampur Mission were working to seek support from East India Company’s Indian subjects particularly from the Hindus. In Bengal a number of different revival and reforms movements arose among Hindus. The first of these led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) who was a former company official. He attempted to change cultural practices and to encourage education. A later movement, the Arya Samaj, also attempted the transformation of traditional modes of Hindu social life. These were movements by people from the growing Hindu middle class, who styled itself as the *bhadralok*, meaning gentleman class. They were the beneficiary of the British rule. Primarily from trading classes, they became intermediaries of revenue administration and obtained subordinate jobs in the imperial administration. On the contrary, the establishment of the British rule removed an entire generation of Muslim urban elites.<sup>8</sup> Muslims largely remained aloof for fear of reprisal and retreated back to the rural areas.

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<sup>6</sup> Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, op. cit. p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> Percival Spar, *A History of India*, vol. 2 (London: Penguin Book, 1978), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> A View of a Nation, Bangladesh Towards 21<sup>st</sup> century, (British Rule in Bangladesh, 1757-1947) (Dhaka: Ministry of information, Government of Bangladesh, <<http://www.citechco.net/bangladesh/>> May 15, 2003), p. 7.

A system of “absentee land lordship” also became commonplace, and “agricultural development stagnated.” In 1837 Persian, the language of the Muslim rulers was replaced with English as the official language of the government causing further Muslim frustration. Unlike the urban Hindus, reaction to these measures led Muslims in noncooperation with the British. They rebelled in rural areas, especially against the *zamindari* system. As a consequence of the company rule Bengali society began to develop division along religious lines.<sup>9</sup> However, despite the growing division in Bengali society, British influence in India continued to increase; by 1850, it had extended into the whole South Asian subcontinent.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their growing differences among Hindus and Muslims, the reaction against the colonial ruler was sometimes unequivocal from both. Within this one hundred year, the realization of the slow takeover by the British was clearly felt by both Hindus and Muslims all over India. On May 10, 1857, Indian soldiers of the British Indian Army, drawn mostly from Muslim units from Bengal, mutinied at the Meerut cantonment near Delhi, starting a year-long insurrection against the British. The mutineers then marched to Delhi and offered their services to the Mughal emperor, whose predecessors had suffered an ignoble defeat 100 years earlier at Plassey. The uprising, which seriously threatened British rule in India, has been called by many names by historians, including the Sepoy

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<sup>9</sup>Abid S. Bahar, “British Rule and the Shaping of Centripetal and Marginal Forces in British Bengal.” A paper presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Bengal Studies Conference, June 9 to 11, 1989, University of Manitoba, Manitoba, Canada.

<sup>10</sup> A View of a Nation, Bangladesh Towards 21<sup>st</sup> century, (British Rule in Bangladesh, 1757-1947) (Dhaka: Ministry of information, Government of Bangladesh, <<http://www.citechco.net/bangladesh/>>May 15, 2003), p. 2.



Rebellion, the Great Mutiny, and the Revolt of 1857; many people of the subcontinent, however, prefer to call it India's "first war of independence."<sup>11</sup>

### Muslims after 1857

The Indian revolt was harshly suppressed by the British. The rebel units finally surrendered on June 20, 1858. The consequences were severe especially for Muslims. Those who rebelled against the British either lost the *zamindari*, or lost their jobs, or exiled, or killed. Part of Delhi was destroyed. Bahadur Shah, the last Moghul emperor, was exiled to Burma, thereby formally ending the Mughal Empire. In exile he wrote:

*Kitna hai badnasib Zafar, dafan ka liea*

*Do gaz zamin vi milna saki kue yar mein.*

(How ill-fated is Zafar that he would not get

Even two yards of land for his burial in his beloved yard!)<sup>12</sup>

These lines of lamentation by the last Mogul emperor were recited over and over again in songs, poems, and in Muslims writings about the loss of their glorious past. It created a profound anxiety among Muslim leaders. This event in the history of South Asian Muslims seem as important as the event of French revolution to the Europeans. Muslim leaders were convinced that something went wrong. They were anxious to know who would lead them now. Muslims felt that they can not simply repeat the "habitual" patterns of life and thought of their ancestors, yet they wished to affirm that ideal behavior which they advocate is essentially to fulfill to the most basic conditions of the community. The event of 1857 was the beginning of modern thinking by Muslim elites of

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<sup>11</sup> Library of Congress, conducted by the US Federal Research Division, Country Studies, "Bangladesh", 1857, "A Great Divide in South Asian History,". James Heitzman (eds.) September, 1988, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy>> (May 15, 2003), p. 5.

South Asia.<sup>13</sup> As a direct consequence of the revolt, the British also felt responsible to its subjects and dissolved the British East India Company for its mismanagement and assumed direct rule over India, beginning the period of the British Raj.<sup>14</sup>

After the 1857 event, Muslim aristocrat class in the north and west then experienced the same despair for their loss of a Muslim empire similar to what Muslims of Bengal lost a century earlier. Muslims were much disorganized after the revolt but there were varieties of emerging perspectives then involving both rationalist and traditionalist movements. An example is the foundation of Dār al-'Ulūm of Deoband in Northern India in 1866.<sup>15</sup> Many of the founders were active during the war of 1857. Many of the prominent revivalist and progressive Muslim leaders were trained at this centre and its branches all over India. Deoband adopted Shah Wali-Allah's (1703-62) thought about resolving the difference between "the learned *"ulama"* and people of insight (the Sufis)" for a revival of the Muslims.

Compared to the early anti-British Faraidi movement in Bengal the later reform movements among Muslims, such as the Deoband movement and also Aligarh movement

<sup>12</sup> Adopted from Shahet Ali Khan's *Intikar Kalam Zafar (Poems of Zafar)*, (in Urdu) (Lahore: Aiend Adab, Chalk Minar, Pakistan, book not dated), p.24. Zafar is the inspired name of Bahadur Shah he used in his poems.

<sup>13</sup> Sheila McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity: A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdudi*. (Waterlo: Wilfred Laurier University, 1984), p. 5, 36. Sheila McDonough records that until the event of 1857 Muslims of India, like those in the Middle East, were of the belief that no further intellectual effort was required. This is based on one of the widespread medieval assumption that, by the twelfth century all necessary original thinking had been done. This assumption is usually expressed by the statement that the gates of *Ijtihad* (fresh thinking) had been closed.

<sup>14</sup> Library of Congress, conducted by the US Federal Research Division, Country Studies, *Bangladesh*, 1857, A great Divide in South Asian History, James Heitzman (eds.) September 1988, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy>> May 15, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf believes that it was "...a school named after the small, country town northeast of Delhi, Deoband, where the original *Madrassa* or seminary of the movement was founded in

that led by the educational reformer, Sayyid Ahmed Khan, took place in Delhi, in north central India. Sayyid Ahmad began his pro-British Aligarh movement in 1875. Ahmad, a Moghul aristocrat and a British civil servant, who personally suffered loss of his family members was of the opinion that Muslims were not inherently anti British. He wanted to convince both the British and its Muslim subjects that they could work together. He began his interpretation of Islam and took a pro-British stand to change the Muslim ways of thinking through Aligarh Movement.<sup>16</sup> Aligarh trained Muslim leaders generally supported the Muslim League founded in 1906 to promote the interest of the Muslims of India. Aligarh and Deoband played important role in religious reform movements in South Asian Islam.

Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani (1885-1976), the subject of this thesis, was born two decades after the 1857 Indian Revolt. He was born in Sherajgonj in the Pabna district of rural Bengal, where the anti-British rebellion was still going on. It is true that, Bhasani's concerns were directly a product of the historic event of 1857. Like many of his contemporaries, his early life (studied in chapter 3) also shows that he started his life after 1857 "among the humiliated." He went to anti -British Deoband for studies. However, he also witnessed the plight of the Bengali peasants in rural Bengal.

Bengal is comprised predominantly by its peasant population. Even before the 1857 Indian revolt Bengali Muslim peasants led anti British movements. They remained fiercely anti British and anti-*zamindar* system. They were also Sufi inspired Muslims. Maksud comments about some of the famous anti British rural Muslim Bengali

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1867" Barbara D. Metcalf "Traditionalist Islamic Activism." [http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/metcalf\\_text\\_only.htm](http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/metcalf_text_only.htm) July 3, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Sheila McDonough. Muslim Ethics and Modernity: A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdudi, op. cit., pp. 26-53.

rebellions. Syed Nesar Ali Titumir (1782-1831) was one of them. Titumir was a contemporary of Ram Mohan Roy. Titumir organized movements against both the officials of the Company and the *zamindars* in Chabbish Porgona, Nadia, Jessore, and Faridpur. Later on there were also the leaders of the *Faraidi* movement such as Haji Shariatullah (1782-1840), and his son Mohsinullah Dudu Mia (1819-1863). They organized poor peasants, weavers, and other working class people in the Faridpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Gopalganj, Manikgonj, Munshigonj, and in Narayangonj to fight against the the British and the “oppressive” *zamindars*.<sup>17</sup>

Bhasani, brought up among the peasants of Bengal had developed his concerns primarily with respect to the welfare of the Bengali peasants through struggle against the British. These goals were significantly different from the general religious concerns of other Muslim reformers in the north and western parts of India after 1857. Bhasani was a contemporary of Gandhi, Azad, Nehru, Jinnah, Maududi and Ilyas. All were the prominent leaders and religious figures of the subcontinent born after the events of 1857. Unlike many of his contemporaries, early in life Bhasani received Qádiriya Sufi training, which emphasized the importance of spirituality over religious normativism.

As a Muslm religious leader during this time, he like his contemporaries was exploring the future of Muslims. Muslim leaders at this juncture of history were asking themselves, “who is going to lead Muslims now?” However, Bhasani comes from the bottom of the bottom of Bengal where Hindu *zamindars* were the elite and where suffering was the most acute. Therefore, he remained focused on the Bengali peasants.

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<sup>17</sup> Maksud, Syed Abul. Bhasani (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1986), p. 5.

An extensive, admiring literature about Bhasani especially after his death in 1976 had accumulated. Most of these works describe who Bhasani was. Typical of this material is the essay by Rajia Majid. Majid is a Bengali writer and an educationist describing a meeting with Bhasani, viewed as a revered man said:

I heard that Bhasani led a simple life. Before I visited Bhasani I did not know that it was so simple. He lived in a thatched hut. There is a mat on the floor. When I went to meet him, he was taking rest on the mat after having lunch. In this country, meeting a political leader requires one to go through many formalities. This is true even if it is to see a civil servant, there are so many obstacles to face, so many formalities to observe in this that most often such attempts are not materialized. Invariably, excuses like, *Shaheb* [meaning the boss] is busy, is an often said statement but as we went to meet Bhasani, his door was wide open. We did not face any obstacle and nobody even asked us any questions. Therefore, without hesitation we went inside his house. He got up and smilingly asked us to sit down. We sat by his side on the mat.<sup>18</sup>

Rajia Majid's curiosity was aroused by Bhasani's unusual behavior, and she observed him closely:

I was looking at him frequently, to find out who was he. He was a man of medium stature, a bit chubby with white beard. At first look, he looks like a quiet person but his spirit inside is like a burning fire. When he talks, he uses simple verses that were lively and easy to understand. Whatever he believes, he says without hesitation.<sup>19</sup>

The many studies of Mawlana Bhasani by colleagues and academics are interesting. Some point out the peculiarities of his character or marks of his "greatness," such as his simple living or uncommon devotion to politics. Others denigrate him, claiming that he had "no direction in politics", was a "Communist," a "Muslim fanatic" or "opportunist." The findings of this research shows that both views were, for the most part, based on hearsay speculation and invalid inferences rather than on any detailed

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<sup>18</sup> Rajia Majid, "Bhasanikae Jemon Dakechee" (The way I saw Bhasani) in Hasan Abdul Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani) (Bengali), (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1988), p.162.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

knowledge of his life and thought. It is surprising how little serious scholarly work has been done on Bhasani. It is as if the whole world knew him but did not know him well. Neither of the two very opposite views of him gets at the essence of his thought or explains his appeal to the masses. Bhasani passionately wanted to convey to his people what he believed in. He was in the public eye for nearly five decades and people listened to him. Bhasani's political career spans through his long years of fight for Bengali peasants in Assam, against the feudal Pakistani rulers in Pakistan and his fight against the undemocratic regime of Mujib in Bangladesh.

Making sense of his life as a study in religion and politics seemed at first a bit difficult. During his political career after all, he seemed to have taken so many positions, and a number of times he turned against groups and people he had previously supported such as the Congress Party, Muslim League, or the government in Bangladesh. In the course of investigating Bhasani's political leadership, questions continuously arose about what he so passionately wanted to communicate to the people that made him controversial to some, but popular among the masses. There are several ways to interpret his life. But crucial among them are the questions; what are his core ideas and what type of Islamic ideas did he profess? How did he use them in his political career?

In a seminar observed to mark the anniversary of Bhasani's death on November 17, 1998 in Montreal attended by South Asian people, Bhasani was depicted by some speakers as a hero of Bangladesh and others as a great leader of South Asia who fought relentlessly against the *zamindari* system, campaigned against "ruthless rulers," and who

later worked in the liberation war of Bangladesh.<sup>20</sup> In general, the speakers showed respect for Bhasani as a political leader. However, I found no answer to the question about the importance of the religious beliefs/commitments for Bhasani's political position. In other words, I wanted to understand the basis of his leadership or what made him such an important leader for so long. The present literature on Bhasani could not answer these questions either. Thus, it seems vital to examine Bhasani's ideas and to determine how he followed these ideas in his political career.

The present work is not a biography of Bhasani, nor is it intended to cover every aspect of Bhasani's life. Therefore, I make no claim to a complete explanation or narration, either of his life or of his work and activities, much less is it my intention to deal with him as a charismatic leader, or with his other activities. Clearly, as mentioned before, there can be alternative approaches to understanding Bhasani in those respects. The purpose of this research is to make a contribution to the understanding of the basis of Bhasani's political leadership. His leadership was unique because of the specific type of religious current Bhasani emerged from. My hypothesis is that many political observers and scholars were unable to grasp his religious perspectives because of their inadequate understanding of Bhasani's type of Islam. In this sense, my purpose is a more modest one: to identify and analyze the particular type of religious vision (religious and philosophical ideas) Bhasani had and to trace its development in different periods of his political career, to see if the motives are opportunistic or principled.

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<sup>20</sup> A seminar on the topic of Bhasani's role in the Politics of the Indian subcontinent held in CLAM (Carrefour de Liaison et d' Aide Multi-ethnique) centre in Montreal on the day of the anniversary of his death, Nov. 17, 1998.

### Religious and Philosophical Ideas

By Bhasani's religious and philosophical ideas, generally we mean those ideas he derived from the Quran and other Islamic thought and tradition.<sup>21</sup> He expressed his ideas as a model. His ideas were seen to be expressed in his speeches, anecdotes and in pamphlets. They are more like his "ideas in action."<sup>22</sup> Bhasani's ideas or world views derived from his deeply held religious beliefs. They had, without doubt, a political character, but were religiously grounded.

My purpose is to define the type of ideas Bhasani embraced, as well as the concerns to which his ideas were addressed. In his use of religious ideas, what concepts did he use to attract the peasants of Bengal, and what were his preferences? How did he tackle the problems he set out to solve are addressed in this research.

In this research, the term leadership refers to the ability of an individual to attract followers to his ideas. The literature on leadership, often "support[s] the romantic conception of the leader, endowed with magic attributes." Perhaps we assume that "we

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<sup>21</sup> I am using the concept "philosophy" in a general, popular sense not in a specific sense to mean Islamic philosophy.

<sup>22</sup> The Marxian concept of dominant ideology seems to view ideology as a veil of deception created by the ruling class and imposed on the lower classes. According to Marx, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling "material" force of society is at the same time its ruling "intellectual" force." Against this dominant ideology, Marx stresses the supposedly "scientific" approach of communism. Karl Marx, from *The German Ideology* in Robert C. Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Norton, 1978, p. 172. We also avoid the term ideology because ideologies are sometimes given a pejorative sense and are often thought to contain value judgments. In a restricted sense I will call Bhasani's ideas (in their appropriate contexts) as his model. The term ideology when applied will be used here in a "non- judgmental and purely descriptive sense, requiring no examination or verification of its scientific truth." Therefore, Bhasani's religious ideas are not considered as his "ideology" in the above sense but it refers to a "belief system."



are commenced under the guidance of a leader” – “a big man, with almost limitless power.”<sup>23</sup>

Bhasani was a man of unprepossessing appearance. Saiful Islam an associate of Bhasani who traveled with him to India during the 1971 war in his close association describes Bhasani as “a simple man of medium stature, with a beard and simple dress and a cap on a big head.”<sup>24</sup> Bhasani was “neither a big man, nor did he possess great physical strength.” But “possessed other attributes he had learned in his life through work and suffering.”<sup>25</sup> It is clear that the strength of his leadership lay, more in a certain moral authority, rather than immediate personal appeal.

Regarding Bhasani’s political leadership, Bhasani exerts leadership quite obviously in relationship to a variety of political policies and events, etc. for example leading Bengali migrants in Assam to establishing the Awami League and then to establishing the NAP (National Awami Party) party in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Knickerbocker asserts that “the leader emerges as a consequence of the needs of a group of people and of the nature of the situation within which that group is attempting to operate.”<sup>26</sup> This was certainly the case with Bhasani. His thought and action were peculiarly suited to the Bengali context, and especially to the perceptions and needs of the peasant class, which forms a majority of the Bengali population.

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<sup>23</sup> Irving Knickerbocker, “Leadership: A Conception and Some Implications” in Clarence George Browne and Thomas Cohn (eds.), The Study of Leadership (Illinois: Interstate Printers and Publishers), 1958, pp. 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Saiful Islam, Shadinata, Bhasani, Bharat (Independence, Bhasani, India), *op. cit.*, p. 6,

<sup>25</sup> Irving Knickerbocker, “Leadership: A Conception and Some Implications” in Clarence George Browne and Thomas Cohn (eds.) The Study of Leadership *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

### The *Pir* politician

Bhasani was a *pir* that is an Islamic mystic religious leader. He did not, however, retreat to the life of a quiet rural ascetic. The experiences of his early life and events would instead result in a career both as a *pir* and a politician.<sup>27</sup>

Bhasani lived a long life of 91 years. He was in opposition leadership movements all his political life. Because of his controversial stances, he was often in trouble. He spent many years in jail or under house arrest or in underground politics. In the absence of more penetrating questions regarding his identity, such as why he did what he did, his actions and ideas have remained obscure and misunderstood.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature is provided to clarify further what the present research will contribute. Chapter 3 offers Bhasani's life until 1929, explaining what drove him to politics and enquiring into his 'calling' for politics. What did he want to communicate to his people? What compelled him to do so?

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will trace the development of Bhasani's core values and strategies in Assam, Pakistan and in Bangladesh period. In Chapter 7, Bhasani's religious perspectives and varying political stances will be reviewed to understand the relationship of his religious and philosophical ideas to his political leadership.

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<sup>27</sup> Maksud, Syed Abdul. Bhasani, op. cit., p.19.

## CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There have been numerous popular works on Bhasani, but the numbers of serious works are few. Important works include Syed Abdul Maksud's Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, a biography of Bhasani, and Hasan Abdul Quayyum's The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, a huge compilation of short articles, written mainly by his followers as well as by contemporary political observers. Even the latter work does not match the scope and complexity of the subject with a corresponding range of erudition and depth of scrutiny. No comprehensive study has been done focusing on the social context where Bhasani was born, raised and worked, or of the ideas that guided his actions.

One can identify three kinds of literature relevant to understanding the religious basis of Bhasani's leadership. Firstly, the context within which he worked and what circumstances led to his becoming a leader i.e., the South Asian Muslim Bengali context; secondly, Islamic revivalism in South Asia; and thirdly, serious works on Bhasani's leadership in Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

### The Bengali Muslim Context

Muslims rule of Bengal began from the 11<sup>th</sup> century until the 18<sup>th</sup> and later during the British rule Bengali Muslim interaction with the British led to revivalist movements.

Very little attention had been given to the period prior to the British rule. Abdur Rahim's Social and Cultural History of Bengal is one of the important works about the society and culture of Bengal in the period A.D. 1201-1276 (commonly known as the *Sultani* period) which played a special role in the development of the Muslim people in

Bengal.<sup>28</sup> The author identifies the development of Muslim social, cultural and religious life and institutions. His comprehensive study describes the early Arab and Persian military and Sufi missionary settlements in Bengal, and the growth of the Muslim communities, mainly through conversion of Hindus and Buddhists drawn from the local populace. He devotes a great deal of attention to the role of the saints and the Sufis in the development of Bengal's social and cultural life. In this work, one can see that Muslim society in Bengal was founded upon three supporting groups: the Muslim ruling class, Muslim scholars, and the saints and *pirs*. *Pirs* were seen as teachers who gave spiritual guidance and in this way setting the stage for Sufi influence in Bengali society. This period marks the beginning of Sufism in Bengal, which was destined to remain an important part of Bengali society ever since. Rahim's work is a landmark in the quest for a history of the Bengali Muslims. But it does not give us the later developments in the region.

Ram Krisna Mukherjee in his work "Social Background of Bangladeshi Nationalism," like Abdur Rahim, goes on at length to identify the Sufi influence on the conversion of a large Hindu and Buddhist population to Islam.<sup>29</sup> Mukherjee explains that the area east of the *Padma* River (a tributary of the Ganges) comprised the bulk of Bengal. It was not easily accessible from the west but was closely linked with Assam, where Buddhism and later, a loose form of Hinduism prevailed. In this work, the geographical location of Bengal as the Eastern most region of India is stressed as a major factor in the development of its people's distinctive cultural identity and their

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<sup>28</sup> Abdur Rahim, Social and Cultural History of Bengal 1201-1276 (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1963).

<sup>29</sup> Ramkrisna Mukherjee, "Social Background of Bangladeshi Nationalism" in Kathleen Gaugh's (ed.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

assertiveness in the fight against the rulers from Northern India, whether Hindu or in the later period Muslim. In particular, Mukherjee explains that the remoteness of Bengal from the rest of India in the pre-British period helped both Hindus and Muslims of Bengal to eventually develop a common culture. He emphasizes how forces like Hindu *Shahjia* or simplified religion and Islamic Sufi mysticism eventually helped to develop a more secular identity called “Bengali nationalism.” Mukherjee’s thesis is that regional distinctions thus coincided with religious differentiation, and both played their role in Bengali society. To him, the forces of consolidation of Bengali culture, based on both Hindu and Islamic mysticism were greater than the forces of alienation that fundamentalism created in both religions.

It is interesting to see Mukherjee identify key developments in the Bengal of the Sultani period. As a result of the area’s remoteness from first Hindu and later Muslim centres in north India, during this period normative Islam did not develop strong roots in Bengal. He indicates developments in other directions. He deals with Hindu-Muslim syncretism as factors that worked to crystallize Bengali nationalism in the long term. To Mukherjee, the Bengali ethnic unit had thus emerged inspite of local and religious distinctions of the people within the region. In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, there developed a Bengali independence movement against Moghul state power, and a sustained defense organized by the Bengalis against Marata domination in the eighteenth century.

Another similar and interesting work is by Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults as Backgrounds of Bengali Literature, who, in the same vein, acknowledges the importance of Sufism in the secularization of Bengali society. He argued that “Muslim Sufism” and Hindu “simplified religion” and worship of the deity Visnu, as against orthodox religious

systems, found a fertile soil in Bengal and helped in the development of Bengali culture and Bengali Language.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it is interesting to note how the remoteness of Bengal coupled with the presence of both Hindu and Muslim mysticism played a role in social integration through communal harmony. Both Mukherjee's and Ram Khisna's are brief but important works identifying the religious fusion of Hindu- Muslim mysticism that helped to the growth of Bengali nationalism.

This idea about the role of Islamic mysticism is also echoed by A. R. Mallick in his book, British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal: 1757-1856. Mallick looks at it from another angle. To him the trend of Hindu-Muslim syncretism was a result of semi conversion of Hindus to Islam. Such Muslims kept many of their Hindu rituals. This resulted in the confluence of both Sufi mysticism and Hindu mysticism among important cultural groups and trends such as *Boul*, *Murshidi*, *Lalan Shah* and others.<sup>31</sup> Mallick does not go into details on this discussion. The above authors; Rahim, Ramkrishna, Dasgupta and Mallik's work identifies different aspects of the social contexts of the Bengali Muslim people, however, none of them covers it as a topic to give us a whole picture of the Sufi based social context of Bengal.

A. R. Mallick's book goes beyond the Muslim period and deals mainly with the British period. He argues that during the days of the East India Company, as a result of the activities of the Fort Williams College established by the East India Company and activities by Christian missionaries, a new Hindu awareness, separate from the existing

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<sup>30</sup> Shashibhusan Dasgupta, "Obscure Religious Cults as Backgrounds of Bengali Literature" (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1946.) p. 401. Also quoted in Mukherjee in Gough, Imperialism in South Asia, *op cit.*, pp. 3-26.

<sup>31</sup> A. R. Mallik, British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal: 1757-1856 (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), pp. 3-26.

common Hindu-Muslim Bengali awareness, started to develop. Mallick deals in detail with the idea that such a change in group dynamics led to differential developments in Bengal among Muslims and the Hindus.<sup>32</sup>

David Kopf's book British Orientalism and Bengali Renaissance<sup>33</sup> is about the early British rule of India. Kopf argues that the role played by the British East India Company and institutions such as Srirampur Mission and Fort Williams College worked in the direction of a "Bengali Renaissance." By Bengali Renaissance, he means the changes amongst Bengali Hindus only, largely among the urban-based Hindu elites. Kopf also covered the activities of Ram Mohan Roy and his Brahmo Samaj in the growth of this awareness. While tracing the development of Hindu middle class self-consciousness and identifying changes in the Hindu part of the population, he leaves out developments among the Muslim section of the population. Despite his stated aim of dealing with Bengali society in general. Kopf's concept of a "Bengali Renaissance" is an essentially ethnocentric and flawed perception of the changes in Hindu communal order and does not adequately identify developments among Muslim Bengalis. Most other typical works, like that of David Kopf, leave out the forces of resistance against the British as well as against the ruling Hindu *zamindars* in rural Bengal.<sup>34</sup> Works like this on Bengal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which abound are not only biased but are also partial explanations oriented more towards developments among Hindus of this period in Bengal. Unfortunately, in comparison, the literature on developments among Bengali

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<sup>33</sup> David Kopf, British Orientalism and Bengali Renaissance, the Dynamics of Indian Moderanization, 1773-1835 (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhoppdhyay, 1969).

<sup>34</sup> In 1793 British East India Company introduced the ownership of land by the transfer of property rights to individuals who could buy them from the company, creating a system of "oppressive" middleman landlords that served the company interest.

Muslims is scarce. It is evident in the literature of Bengal that British Orientalism and the religious revivalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both among Muslims and Hindus, led to the division in Bengal along religious lines and affected the writings of many scholars of Bengali society.

Ram Krisna Mukherjee's work, "Social Background of Bangladeshi Nationalism" mentioned above, is however, an exception to the above type of work. He skillfully covered the developments among Muslims of Bengal during the British period.<sup>35</sup> He explains how both Hindus and Muslims suffered from suspicions by East India Company officials. However, as direct representatives of the previous rulers, Muslims suffered more than Hindus. In addition, Mukherjee documents the widely held view that the Muslim aristocracy was also persuaded to adopt a policy of aloofness from the Company's activities, and in general retreated to obscure stations or dispersed in the countryside, thereby losing the position of leadership in society, which it had held previously along with its Hindu counterparts.

It is refreshing that while Mukherjee identifies these trends briefly, A. R. Mallick mentioned above, devotes a great deal of his book to fill the gap on the literature of the development of the Muslim trend mainly during the early British period. He identifies the divide and rule policy that the British introduced upon their arrival and how this division between the two religious communities worked. In the course of time, as a consequence of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, the British and the educated Hindus became the urban elites of Bengal. Mukherjee says that while the Muslim rulers of the pre-British period sought and encouraged Hindus to work with Muslims in order to sustain their rule,

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<sup>35</sup> Ramkrisna Mukherjee, "Social Background of Bangladeshi Nationalism" in Kathleen Gaugh (ed.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit.



the new rulers, seeing Muslims as potential enemies, sought the cooperation only of the Hindus in order to sustain their rule. A. R. Mallick examines at great length the deliberate British policy of annihilation of the Muslim aristocracy, which continued until approximately 1870.<sup>36</sup> Mallick argues that as a consequence, the new hierarchy that emerged was composed of the British, (the rulers), Hindus (as the *zamindar*, *banniyas*, and money lenders serving as the intermediaries of the British) and the peasants (largely Muslims). Mallick did not cover the period after 1857.

W.W. Hunter in his book The Indian Musulmans: Are they bound to owe Allegiance to the Queen? (1871) In the beginning of the book it reflects the prejudices of his time, but it provides a graphic picture of the sufferings of the Bengali peasants, following the Muslim loss of empire and political power. According to Hunter, the Permanent Settlement Act of Bengal in 1793 by the East India Company operated throughout Bengal, but in East Bengal it took the character of Hindu landlord versus Muslim peasantry (the latter constituted the bulk of the local population). It enriched the Hindus at the cost of Muslims. Hunter also shows how the Indian Mutiny of 1857 made things worse for the Muslims. It was the Muslim community which the British government was determined to suppress, for they felt that the Mutiny of 1857 was largely instigated and engineered by that community. To Hunter it was the suffering of the Muslims that led to the revolt, particularly in Bengal. As proof of the discontent by the Muslim peasantry against the British, Hunter used the example of the numerous peasant revolutions in Bengal, such as the, Faraidi movement organized by Haji Shariatullah and his contemporaries in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Syed Ahmad Boreli's Wahhábi

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<sup>36</sup> Mallick, British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal: 1757-1856, op. cit.

movement in all over India of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Though the British suppressed some of these movements, the frustration was not ended. Hunter's work was a report to the colonial authority, had biases and did not cover the continued discontent in Bengal during the late nineteenth century, when Bhasani was born.

Syed Abul Maksud, the biographer of Bhasani, briefly places Bhasani in this late nineteenth century context namely, that prior to Bhasani's birth. Abul Maksud's brief narrative in his book on this topic is a classic work on this subject. At the time Bhasani was born, rural Bengal was going through another wave of peasant revolutions in Pabna. Bhasani's early rural life in Pabna shows that he was tormented by the problems faced by the peasants of Bengal. The picture we get here is that the picture painted by A. R. Mallick applies that in urban centres where Hindus responded to the crisis through urban reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy. Roy enacted reforms in the Hindu community, largely in collaboration with the British. Meanwhile, the Muslims remained in their rural stronghold, fiercely anti-British and opposed to the *zamindari* system. To Maksud, this newly emerged pattern of a Hindu-Muslim, rural-urban dichotomy continued during the late colonial period when Bhasani was born. Maksud deals with this period and documents briefly that the Muslim peasant discontent during the late colonial period continued until the end of British rule in India. He deals with the early period of Bhasani's life in Pabna and the later period in Assam in a narrative fashion but unfortunately does not identify in depth the circumstances and events which shaped Bhasani's concerns at his rural upbringing.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The prominent leaders of the Bengal based Faraidi movement were Haji Shariatullah (1782-1840) and his son Dudu Mian's (1819-1860).

<sup>38</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.

A review of the literature on this period prior to Bhasani's birth shows that while all the above authors can give a glimpse of the situation of Bengal, they either do not have adequate theoretical discussion or they fail to provide an adequate understanding of the role of Sufism of Muslim Bengal. In addition no work had been done in situating Bhasani in the context of the Muslim history of Bengal and in reference to the religious currents of the time. In particular, Maksud's work on Bhasani does not account for how a religious person like Bhasani with a Sufi background could have a secular approach in politics. In chapter 3 a brief study of the late colonial period in the becoming of Bhasani will be conducted to fill this gap.

### Islamic Revivalism

Cantwell Smith in his book Islam in Modern History explores the Muslim world and its dynamics in different areas. Smith found the expression of this dynamism in two directions, against internal decay, and against external threat or domination. He surveys different movements in the Muslim world; the Mohammed Wahab's Wahhabism in Arabia, (1703-1787) Afghanis's Pan Islamism in Persia, Egypt and Turkey (1839-97), the Sanusi movement in Libya (1842), the *Mahdi* movement in Sudan (from 1881), Sarekat Islam and the *Muhammadiyah* movement in Indonesia (from 1911). In Bengal, the *Faraidi* movement (1800-1860) is also examined. This movement of Bengal had Sufi ideals and sternly anti British and anti Hindu *zamindari* views, but was largely noncommunal. In the same work, Smith also briefly traces the so-called "Wahhabi" uprisings and their affiliates in the early nineteenth century, and, to a certain extent, the Indian Mutiny (1857), as well as the Indian *Khilafat* Movement (1918-1924), in which Bhasani participated. To Smith they were in part an overt expression of this dynamic

movement in which “the heritage of the past is being transformed into the herald of the future.”<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Smith says “Indian Islam like in the rest of the Muslim world faces the challenge to rehabilitate Islam to get going again in full vigour. It had not lapsed but been driven inward to live as part of the Muslim’s dream.” Smith notes that as an example in Shah Wali Allah’s work *al-Hujjta al- Bálighah* the vision of a purified Islam in its local manifestations retained a marked Sufi colouring.

It is interesting to see that Smith rightly identifies Indian movements such as Wali Allah’s liberal Deoband trend as different from the *Wahhabi* movement of Saudi Arabia. Bhasani was educated in Wali Allah’s theology in Deoband. It provided Bhasani’s theological convictions. One interesting thing, however, that Smith failed to identify was that Deoband was a traditional *ulama* centre that was also fiercely anti-British. Its base of support was in rural India. Bhasani, like the many other *ulama*, *pirs* and Sufis drawn from a rural base were trained in this place. This differed from the pro-British urban based Aligarh movement led by Sayiid Ahmad Khan of UP (Uttar Pradesh), Nawab Abdal-Latif, Amir Ali, and Nawab Salím Allah of Bengal which many scholars have covered in detail. It seems Smith did not delve into the details on the nature of the differentiated development within the Muslim revivalist movements.

John L Esposito in his book Islam and Politics: Pre-Modern and Modern Islamic Revivalist Movements deals with the same theme as Smith, but in a different light. For him, pre-modern movements addressed both the internal weakness of Muslim society as well as Islamic modernism, which itself responded to the challenge of Western

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<sup>39</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Islam in Modern History (New York: A Mentor Book, 1957).

colonialism. Pre-modern revivalism was primarily a response from within Islam to the internal socio-moral decline of the community. In many cases, it led to the creation of Islamic states such as in Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, and Libya. Islamic revivalist movements such as Wahhabis in Arabia, Mahdism in the Sudan, and Sanusis in Libya were forerunners of twentieth century Islamic Modernism.

Esposito rightly contends that unlike the *Wahhabi* movement in Saudi Arabia which suppressed Sufism, in Africa, “a series of *jihad* movements led to the establishment of Islamic states, including those led by Utman dan-Fodio (1754-1817) in northern Nigeria, the grand Sanusi in Libya (1787-1859) and the Mehdi of the Sudan (1848-85). A distinctive characteristic of most African revivalist movements was its leadership: reformist, militant, and politically oriented Sufi orders. Libya and the Sudan provide striking examples of Sufi led *jihad* revivalist movements,” as does Abd al-Qadir’s in Algeria. Unlike the Wahhábis of Arabia, the latter reformers sought to align Sufism with the more orthodox path. Esposito finds this brand of revivalist movements closer to that of Shah Wali Allah than that of Abd al- Wahháb. As Esposito states, “the socio-political dimension of Islam was reintroduced when African Islamic movements, led by Sufi brotherhoods, fought to establish Islamic states.”<sup>40</sup>

In both Smith’s and Esposito’s works, *Wahhabi* and Sufi based movements were seen as renewal movements against colonial domination. They perceived Sufi based movements were more liberal and modernist than Wahhabi movements. They also reiterated the fact that the latter emphasized “normativism” and were “fanatic in spirit”, as was the case in Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>40</sup> John Esposito, *Islam and Politics: Pre-Modern and Modern Islamic Revivalist Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984).

Donahu and Esposito (ed.) Islam in Transition, specifically cover original works of Muslim thinkers and reformers in different Muslim countries. This book includes a selection on various Islamic models used in Pakistan. Interesting among them was Maududi's model of an Islamic theocratic state based on a traditional understanding of the concept of *jihad*. Maududi was the founder of Jamiati Islami. Fazlur Rahman's model of a state based on "popular sovereignty" is also presented. This latter model is similar to Western democratic models, with slight variations. In this book, Islamic religious orientation in politics is classified by Donahu and Esposito into different trends, one being "populist Islam" and the other, "fundamentalist Islam." Bhasani's Sufi based model was not identified at all in any of the collections. Bhasani was often mentioned in these works in important events of Pakistani politics but his kind of religious perspective /model was not mentioned at all.<sup>41</sup>

Michel C. Hudson's article "Islam and Politics" in Donahu and Esposito's book contends that Islam like other religious ideologies is used to maintain stability, economic growth and pursue policies both by established regimes as well by the opposition to legitimize their actions. Groups or governments seeking legitimacy will thus claim "to represent the purest, truest, and often the most extreme form of Islam." While examples of this from different countries, such as Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, are mentioned, it is unfortunate that in these and other works on Pakistan, Bhasani was not identified.<sup>42</sup> None of the above works touch upon Bhasani's type of Islamic ideas which made him so popular, especially among the peasants of Bengal.

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<sup>41</sup> John J. Donahu and John Esposito (ed.) Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>42</sup> Michael Hudson, "Islam and Political Development" in John Esposito (ed.) Islam and Development. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980).

Asghar Ali Engineer's Sufism and Communal Harmony is a compilation of articles. The book deals with the trend of egalitarianism in Islam. Citing instances from Islamic history, the author explains that unlike the rightist normativist's emphasis on Islamic *Sharia*, there are other Islamic reform movements that have placed greater emphasis on Islamic social justice<sup>43</sup> He even called these "Islamic left." In his categorization, two types of movements are mentioned, "fundamentalist Islam" also known as "normative Islam" and what he calls the "Islamic left." To Engineer, like its counterpart, "Islamic left", although a relatively modern movement has its doctrinal roots in the Quran and in the early period of Muslim history. It shares with many historical Islamic movements the recurring impulse to renew the faith through a return to the simplicity of prophetic times and through the establishment of a just society. Although Bhasani's ideas of *rububiyah* are fundamentally about social justice, it fits very well within the latter categorization. Engineer, an Indian writer himself, does not identify Bhasani's ideas in this context.

Despite the fact that Bhasani played an important role in the politics of the subcontinent, especially in Pakistani politics, no authors outside Bengal have identified his model. In particular, no English source has examined Bhasani's views and its political applications.

There are several reasons for this neglect. Unlike the other politicians of his time, Bhasani did not write his biography nor did he publish his ideas in a systematic form. His thought was rather of a dynamic kind, expressed and then practically applied to situations

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<sup>43</sup> Ashghar Ali Engineer, Sufism and Communal Harmony (Joipur: Printwel, 1991).

as they arose. The rarity among scholars of Islam of expertise in Bengali might also account for Bhasani's relative obscurity in the record of modern Islam.

### Studies of Bhasani's Leadership

Hasan Abdul Quayyum's Mazlu'm Jonanata Mawlana Bhasani's (Mawlana Bhasani: the Great Leader of the Oppressed) mentioned before, is a compilation of short articles in Bengali by academics and political observers in their role as newspaper columnists and Sufi followers of Bhasani who record anecdotes about his life. This book covers almost every detail on every topic about Bhasani's political leadership in Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh. After a brief introduction by the editor, the book has articles by important and outstanding authors on Bhasani as a person, as a family man, and as a leader.

In the above book, a narrative about the subject of Assam is found in Korban Ali's article, "Sritita Mawlana Bhasani" (Mawlana Bhasani in My Recollections). It is an interesting account of his observation of Bhasani's Sufi followers who worked for him in his political activities. He thinks that these Sufi followers were behind Bhasani's success in organizing political meetings and demonstrations. This work did not provide any link between Bhasani's vision and his political activities but attributes his leadership to his power as a *pir* in politics.

Another article in the book is by Shahed Ali, a companion of Bhasani from his Assam days, who describes Bhasani's dedication to the defence of the rights of the landless peasants fighting against the Line system (a British government act to stop Bengali settlement in Assam). However, he does not explain why or what political views led him to fight against it. These omissions will be compensated for by using Bhasani's speeches, since these provide the justifications for his actions.



S. Mujibullah's short but important article, "Mawlana Bhasani: *Hukkullah o Huqqúq al'ibád* (*The Rights of God and Rights of His Servants* *Huqqúq al'ibád*)" describes key concepts of Bhasani's ideas. This article also briefly explains why Bhasani, though a religious person did not remain apolitical but became deeply involved in politics. Most works ignored discussion of his philosophical concepts such as *Hukúmat-i Rabbíní*, *Huqqúq al'ibád*, and *rubúbiyah*. Mujibullah's short article does not show the use of Bhasani's ideas in his political activities in detail. Some other authors, when they do mention Bhasani's ideas do so at random without following events in a chronological order, or examining their development. We are left wondering why his leadership was such as it was.

Some articles in Quiyyum's work repeat events mentioned in other articles. In a way, this is a desirable thing, since this sort of cross checking provides some measure of the accuracy of these stories. Sufis talk in anecdotes that have moral reasoning. In this book there are several articles by his Sufi followers that recorded Bhasani's narratives in anecdotal form. Those articles also refer to his ideas. Although this book is not a systematic account of Bhasani's thought overall, the great variety of articles paint a full portrait of Bhasani from different angles and thus help to figure out who the real Bhasani was.

Two things about this book deserve mentioning. Firstly, these authors provide us with all the events in details. Secondly, in this volume there are also other articles written by apologists. It is true that apologist hinders intellectual accuracy and encourage "close circle." One such typical work is by Shariful Alam Almazi's, "Rupkother Rajputra Mawlana Bhasani" (Maulana Bhasani, the Prince of Fairy Tales, and Mawlana Bhasani). In this short article he defends Bhasani who fought against the British and against

Pakistani rulers. To the author he fought like a prince of fairy tales without explaining why.<sup>44</sup>

It is quite normal to have apologetic writings on a spiritual leader who was also a politician. In this volume there are numerous works like Almazi's. They granted him an exalted status. To some of his fanatical followers, some of whom I met during my fieldwork, criticism of their spiritual political leader is intolerable.

The fact that Bhasani played an important role in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh makes him a most controversial figure during the liberation period. Some important events of his life relevant to this period were recorded in other works at some length. An intimate account of Bhasani at this time can be found in Saiful Islam's Shadhinata, Bhasani O Bharat<sup>45</sup> (Independence, Bhasani, India). This book is a very interesting and revealing account of Bhasani's trip to India during the 1971 War of Independence of Bangladesh. Although the author covered only the period of the liberation war, an important part of his life, he reveals clues to understanding Bhasani through anecdotal fashion. This type of information provides important ways to know Bhasani's understanding of religion both in its worldliness, and its spiritual aspects.

Saiful Islam's study also brought evidence about Bhasani's house arrest in India. The picture we get is that the government of India feared him for his power to "stir up people's emotion." A strong theme running through this work is that he was warmly received by Hindu followers in Calcutta and Muslim followers in Assam indicating his

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<sup>44</sup> Shariful Alam Almazi's, "Rupkothar Rajputra Mawlana Bhasani" (The Prince of Fairy Tales, Mawlana Bhasani) in Hasan Abdul Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani) op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> Saiful Islam, Shadhinata, Bhasani, India (Independence, Bhasani, India) (Dhaka: Awan Publishers, 1987).

secular approach to politics. His reactions during wartime are indicated in his speeches, recorded by the author. This is an important source of information on Bhasani's time in India. On the other hand, while his activities are recorded, Saifur Rahman's brief period of observation of Bhasani's leadership in India led him to characterize his entire leadership as based on "empty slogans," reducing him, by implication, to a man without a vision in politics.

Syed Irfanul Bari was an associate of Bhasani, during the Bangladesh period. He edited Mawlana Bhasanir Bumika (Role of Mawlana Bhasani) (1974),<sup>46</sup> a compilation of documents and short articles expressing different authors' experiences with Bhasani and including Bhasani's speeches. This work also has documents about Bhasani's Farakka March in 1976. Some of the articles deal with his time after he returned from India, and the stand he took against the ruling government in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh he became controversial, especially for his stand against the "abuse of power" by the new government as well as its pro-Indian policy. As a result, both Bangladeshi government and some Indian scholars and political observers branded him a "fundamentalist." These works in the above mentioned book, though not biographies, do provide a great deal of useful information about Bhasani's leadership in Bangladesh period.

Manmath Nath Das makes reference to Bhasani in his book, Partition and Independence of India. He deals with Bhasani as a controversial leader of the Muslim League. He cites the Assam government who called Bhasani as a "fanatical immigrant."<sup>47</sup> But Bhasani himself said repeatedly that he was not, and that he was only defending the rights of the peasants, the majority of whom happen to be Muslims. The Assam

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<sup>46</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari, Role of Mawlana Bhasani (Santosh: Santi Press, 1974).

government and Das did not seem to care to become familiar with Bhasani's ideology of *rubūbiyah*, which seems to be the cause of confusion.

There are other Indian writers such as Bimal J. Dev and Dilip K. Lahiri who have produced a work on the Assam period entitled, "The Line System of Assam."<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that they cite Bhasani in his call to fight for the rights of the peasants. Dev and Lahiri justify Bhasani's decision to change party affiliation from the Congress Party to the Muslim League and characterize him as a progressive leader. However, Dev and Lahiri fail to identify the underlying reasons for his political decisions or for the progressive nature of his religious perspectives. This thesis will deal with that subject in Chapter 4.

As in his Assam period, most of the works on the Pakistan period, including some in English, mention Bhasani only in passing. Thus he was not studied at great length. One such work is K. K. Aziz's, History of Partition of India (3rd volume).<sup>49</sup>

Rao Farman Ali in his book Butto, Mujib and Bangladesh, identifies Bhasani as an "agitator", dedicated to serving the poor, but also as a "rabble rouser." This is not a detailed account of Bhasani or his model. Like the other authors, he mentioned Bhasani in passing. It must be borne in mind that Rao Farman Ali was a civil servant serving the Yahya government of the wartime cabinet. Thus attributing the epithet "rabble rouser" without justifying it, is a partisan view.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Manmath Nath Das, Partition and Independence of India. (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1982).

<sup>48</sup> Bimal J.Dev and Dilip K.Lahiri, "The Line System of Assam," Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Vol. XXX111, 1978, p. 212.

<sup>49</sup> K. K. Aziz, History of Partition of India, (2nd volume) (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1988).

<sup>50</sup> Farman Ali, Butto, Sheikh Mujib and Bangladesh (Dhaka: Saukhin Publishers, 1978),

Manik Mia, the editor of the Daily *Ittifaq*, the most popular daily during Bhasani's time in Pakistan politics characterized Bhasani as an "Indian agent." To the editor, Bhasani was "a political opportunist and a situational ethicist," meaning he was a divider not a uniter.<sup>51</sup> This editor's comments came out after Bhasani said "Goodbye" to Pakistan. Manik Mia's characterization is a serious attack on Bhasani's leadership. It seems Manik Mia thought the very act of saying "goodbye" in the early years of the birth of Pakistan was enough to characterize Bhasani as a divider in Pakistani politics. This characterization also implies that Bhasani did not have a systematic model guiding his political actions. Bhasani himself explained that he was wrongly demonized for this. Manik Mia's claims will be understood in the context of Pakistan's early years.

Chandrika' Gulati's Bangladesh: Liberation to Fundamentalism is a very biased study. She correlates the post liberation Bangladeshi politics to fundamentalism. Bhasani's opposition to the opening of the Indian dam over the Ganges River caused Gulati to label Bhasani a "fundamentalist" leader.<sup>52</sup> She considers that India helped Bangladesh in its liberation war against Pakistan and even gave shelter to Bhasani during that time. She then notes how ungratefully Bhasani opposed India after the war. It should be noted that Bangladesh fought against Pakistan on the basis of cultural rather than religious differences with Pakistan. As opposed to her claim, only an insignificant number of "fundamentalists" - less than 5% - were elected during the decade after the independence of the country and Bhasani was seen by the fundamentalists as their enemy. Gulati openly favours the Indian side on these matters, and sees Bhasani as overtly an

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<sup>51</sup> See for details on Manik Mia's comment see Shamsul Huda, Chowdhury's Akhuttorar Bijoy (The Victory of 1971), (Dhaka: Bijoy Prokashani, 1980), p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Gulati, Chandrika, Bangladesh: Liberation to Fundamentalism: A Study of Volatile Indo-Bangladesh Relations. (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1988).

*alim* (religious leader), with an Islamic outlook opposed to the Indian government's supposedly secular policies. Therefore, he was a "fundamentalist" leader. She ignores Bhasani's justifications of why he fought against India's "Water aggression." She has taken the fact of his religious leadership as sufficient proof of his "fundamentalism" without giving consideration to his type of religious perspective and his understanding of the geo-political context of the subcontinent. This is a conservative Indian perspective on the complex political developments in Bangladesh.

Haji Danesh's "Mawlana Bhasani's *Rajnaithk Jibon*" (Mawlana Bhasani's Political Life),<sup>53</sup> a brief but important article, focuses on Bhasani's leadership. Danesh a Communist leader worked with Bhasani during the Pakistan period. He had contact with Bhasani in jail and explains that he tried to persuade Bhasani to become a Communist but Bhasani refused. He wrote about Bhasani's concern for poor people but unlike other colleagues, Danesh was more critical than apologetic in explaining Bhasani's political life. Danesh, himself, in his early life, was a pious Muslim, who only later became a Communist. He stated that Bhasani had an opposition mentality and was basically an "agitator." To him he was "unique in agitating peasants and workers." But in this short article he failed to go beyond his superficial understanding of Bhasani. The article's failure to relate to the theme of Bhasani's religious outlook and his role as a peasant leader results in a reduction of his role to that of an "agitator."

Syed Abul Maksud, Bhasani's biographer, in his book Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, recounts after a brief introduction on Bhasani's early life, the details of

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<sup>53</sup> Danesh, Haji, "Mawlana Bhasanir Rajnaitik Jibon" (Mawlana Bhasani's Political Career) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit.

Bhasani's involvement in important events in Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>54</sup> Maksud provides a chronological account of Bhasani's activities in Assam as a leader fighting for peasant's rights, especially his fight against the xenophobic policy of the Assam government's Line System against immigrant Bengalis and how Bhasani was arrested many times and put in jail. The government's discriminatory policy against the Bengalis compelled him to launch a fight against the government. Perhaps due to the agrarian nature of Assam and Bengali society and the remoteness of the time, Maksud like other authors did not have abundant source materials on Assam period.

Maksud devotes a large part of his work to dealing with important events in Pakistan, such as Bhasani's role in the 1956 Kagmeri conference where he said "goodbye" to Pakistan. Maksud also describes the 1969 mass uprising against Pakistan, and Bhasani's involvement in the 1971 liberation war. He also details Bhasani's involvement in the post liberation Bangladesh period, and his fight against the Mujib regime's one party rule and his fight against India's Farakka dam project. Maksud also identifies Bhasani's religious ideas of *rububiyah*. While the author does an excellent job as a biographer of narrating the events effectively and identifying Bhasani's ideas, his work lacks a central theme or argument. Bhasani's use of a model in politics is, thus again, overlooked. However, as a systematic account of Bhasani's life from the beginning to the end, Abul Maksud's work is very helpful in providing information on Bhasani.

In the above, we have seen that Bhasani's life was covered only in passing and many scholars and political observers were quick to label him generally either as a leader without any systematic world views or, when his ideas were recognized, they were

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<sup>54</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani (Bengali), *op. cit.*

unable to give illustrations of what they meant. As a result they failed to relate his ideas or the central features of his ideas to his leadership. What is missing is a genuine attempt at understanding the relationship between Bhasani's political actions and his ideas. It is a complex issue that deserves and needs to be explored in greater depth.

The above review shows firstly, there is a vacuum on the significance and unique conjunction of religion and politics that constitutes Bhasani's life and vision. There has been an apparent failure to understand the religious views of Bhasani. Secondly, Bhasani has rarely been studied outside Bangladesh, except for the occasional cursory analysis of his involvement, mostly during the Pakistan period. Thirdly, among Bengali authors, the tendency has been to emphasize his leadership without understanding (a) its religious basis, and (b) how he used the religious approach in politics. Finally, most of the above works written about Bhasani focus on the various aspects of his life and achievements from different perspectives, such as, his time in Assam, in Pakistan: different aspects of his personality, for example, as a Sufi *pir*, a politician, and a loving family member; or his different accomplishments, such as his forming of new political parties, launching of newspapers, his philanthropic activities, his founding of schools and colleges, and his leading the historic Farakka march against India's building of a dam over the Ganges river. Certainly, there is merit in these works and they clearly provide enough material for research for the serious scholar. I have tried to fill this vacuum by investigating many questions about Bhasani's religious perspectives and his understanding of Islam; the constituent features of his vision, and the nature of its Islamic perspective. In reference to the latter, I also enquire how his understanding of Islam differed from the traditional understanding. In other words, I tried to find out the religious character of Bhasani's



political leadership, the secret to his effectiveness and also why did he keep his ideas elusive but all embracing.

Bhasani's model has liberalizing influence against religious fundamentalism, providing a progressive model of Islam (discussed in chapter 3). The survey of the literature points to the following important findings: There is a remarkable interest in Bhasani within Bangladesh and India but, as indicated above, little in the way of a genuine understanding of the man and his ideas. Given the fact that Bhasani's role was not adequately explored by academics, the available interpretation of Bhasani is inadequate, misleading and biased. Anybody who is interested in what is going on now in the Muslim world will find this work interesting.

No substantial work has been done on him in English that deals with the religious basis of Bhasani's leadership. This research work, tries to fill the gap and make Bhasani more comprehensible to modern English readers of South Asia. I feel strongly that it will contribute to knowledge of that area and of an important figure in the history of modern Islam.

### CHAPTER 3: BHASANI'S LIFE UNTIL 1929 - BHASANI'S BIRTH, EDUCATION AND WORLDVIEW

Our main focus in this thesis is essentially Bhasani's use of his ideas during Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh periods. A comprehensive study of the major influences on the life of Bhasani is beyond the scope of this study. However, we will need to deal at some length with the historical factors that affected his convictions. The first section of the chapter will discuss on the birth and education of Bhasani followed by an examination of his thoughts and politics as they relate to his religious beliefs.

Research shows that Bhasani's early life and other experiences helped build his commitment to his lifelong fight for justice. Fredrick Bird in his work on theories of justice says "[ideas] of justice arise and gain popularity whenever people assume that historical changes promoting social improvement are possible." Bird says:

...social arrangements may be perceived to be intolerable, oppressive and inequitable when persons feel,... that it is indeed possible to change the patterns of social life in order to construct new institutional arrangements that are more humane. The view that genuine historical improvement is possible, however difficult and however unlikely develops within the consciousness of people as they experience historical changes that make this prospect seem plausible.<sup>55</sup>

Bird is speaking in the context of new religious reform movements but we will see that it is also applicable in the context of Bhasani's political leadership in Bengal. What explains Bhasani's intense commitment to his cause? There seem to be several explanations: among them especially striking are his early childhood in rural Bengal and his Sufi education.

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<sup>55</sup> Fredrick Bird, "Theories of Justice in New Religious and Para-Religious Movements", an Unpublished Paper in the Department of Religion, (Montreal: Concordia University, date not available).

**Table 2: Showing Chronology of Events until 1929**

1885	Bhasani was born in the village of Dahngora in Sherajgonj, Pabna of present Bangladesh.
1889	His father died.
1897- 1899	The great famine
1898	His grandmother, mother and two brothers and a sister died of Cholera.
1898	Bhasani briefly stayed with the uncle then left his uncle at the age of 13.
1901	Bhasani was brought to Assam as an orphan by a <i>pir</i> known as Nasiruddin Bagdadi.
1907-1908	He stayed at Darul Uloom of Deoband in India. He was educated by Shaykh al- Hind Mahmudul Hasan. He was known to have come into contact with other anti- imperialist Islamic thinkers.
1909	He taught at a primary school in Kagmari in Tangail.
1909-1913	He did several things: worked with an anti-British leftist terrorist group in Calcutta, Bengal. In 1913 he left the group.
1911	The anti partition movement led to surge in serious communal politics between Hindus and Muslims. Bhasani did not join either Hindu or Muslim groups.
1915-1917	Bhasani returned to Tangail to teach in a Madrassa.
1918	Went to <i>haj</i> as a companion of the <i>zamindar</i> of Panch Bibi.
1919	Gandhi led his all India agitation, known as <i>Satyagraha</i> movement. Joined the Congress Party at the inspiration of Mawlana Mohammed Ali.
1920	Worked for the <i>Khilafat</i> movement.
1921	Under the leadership of C. R. Das Bhasani participated at the non-cooperation movement and was jailed. Gandhi calls off the non-cooperation movement. Azad's <u>Tarjuman al-Quran</u> was published.
1921-22	Bhasani supervised relief distribution activities in flood affected areas of North Bengal with C.R. Das. He worked in the Das's <i>Sharaj</i> Dal a regional political party that promoted Hindu -Muslim cooperation.
1925	C.R. Das died. Bhasani decides to leave politics. Got married with Begum Alema Khatun, from Panchbibi, Bagura.
1926	Joined in the Krishak Praja Andalon. The Governor of Bengal declared him undesirable and expelled him from Bengal. He left for Assam.
1929	First historic peasant conference with Bengali migrant landless peasants in Bhasan <i>char</i> (island) in Gopalpara district of Assam.

Source: Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani (Bengali), (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994). Also Hasan Abdul Quayyum (ed.) Majlum Jananata Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani) (in Bengali) (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1988).

## SECTION 1: MAJOR INFLUENCES

### Birth and Education (1885-1929)

Bhasani was born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mofizul Islam says he was born in 1880.<sup>56</sup> Bhasani himself said that he did not know the exact date of his birth, though he offered the year 1885. Maksud, reviewing the other circumstances at the time of his birth, agrees to the year 1885 as the most likely date.<sup>57</sup> In the informal society of riverine rural Bengal where Bhasani was born, recording birth dates is not regarded as an important practice. Only if the child goes to school is this considered important and even then, an approximate date is often used. Thus, no one is certain about the exact date of Bhasani's birth. What is certain is the context within which he was born and raised.

The *Faraidi* Movement against the British *zamindari* system began to emerge throughout Bengal strongly from 1806 and continued throuout nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> As mentioned in chapter 1, the famous Indian revolt against the British East India Company's rule, took place in 1857. If Bhasani was born in 1885, it was in the wake of these events. Saiful Islam says that the famous peasant revolution of 1872-73 in Sherajgonj of Pubna district, where Bhasani was born, was still fresh in people's memory.<sup>59</sup> In the same year the Indian Association, later named the Congress Party, was formed in Calcutta, Bengal. It was during this turbulent time in Bengal and in the rest of South Asia that Bhasani was born.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Mofizul Islam, *Upomohadesher Rajniti O Baiktitya* (Politics and Personality of the Subcontinent) (Dhaka: Boi Bitan, 1998), p. 30.

<sup>57</sup> Syed Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Ziaul Hasan Farouqui, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan* (New York: Asia Publications, 1963), p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> Saiful Islam, *Shadhinata, Bhasani, Bharat (Independence, Bhasani, India)*, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 3.

Bhasani was the second son of *Haji* Mohammed Sharafat Ali Khan and Mohammed Mojiron Bibi. He had two brothers, one elder and one younger. He also had a younger sister. Maksud says that Bhasani said very little about his family and his early life.<sup>61</sup> It seems that even his associates and travel companions only knew about his life in anecdotal form. Irfanul Bari records his conversation with Bhasani about his early life as follows:

Bhasani's father named Bhasani Abdul Hamid Khan, with the nick name "Chaga Mia." In his early life he was simply called "Chaga Mia." He was named after "a popular, bony and tough built fish commonly available in riverine Bengal". This was perhaps because, while a child, Bhasani was well built and healthy.<sup>62</sup>

Maksud describes Bhasani's family status while his father was alive. His parents were descended from a well- to- do rural Bengali Muslim family.<sup>63</sup> To Maksud, Bhasani's last name – Khan - was an indication of his family's economic affluence. Based on this assumption Maksud interviewed Bhasani during his lifetime and asked him about his father's financial status. Bhasani narrated that his father had owned "seven biga\* of land and a grocery store."<sup>64</sup> This claim is reinforced by the fact that at around 35 years of age, Bhasani's father went to do *haj* in Mecca, which Maksud suggests, would have been impossible for a poor Bengali Muslim peasant to do. Therefore, according to Maksud, Bhasani must have been born in a well off family, by Bengali standards.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, *op. cit.* p.11-14.

<sup>62</sup> This information was obtained from my personal interview of Irfanul Bari, July 1995. Also see Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. op. cit.*, p.11.

<sup>63</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p.12.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.12.

\*A *biga*, unit of land is equivalent to one third of an acre.

<sup>65</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p.12.

In 1889 Chaga Mia's father died. Maksud says that Chaga Mia then was only five year's old and his brothers and sister was also under aged. Bengali families are male dominated, and there was no other adult male member in the family to look after the children and the business. The employees in the grocery store took care of the business for a while, but finally the family was unable to keep it.<sup>66</sup>

In 1894-95 cholera struck in different regions of Sherajonj. In a few weeks thousands died, among them Chaga Mia's family. His mother, two brothers, his only sister, and his grandparents all died. Chaga Mia however, miraculously survived. At the time, he was only eight years old.<sup>67</sup> Chaga became an orphan.

Between 1897 and 1899, there was a great famine.<sup>68</sup> Bhasani says that when he was ten or twelve years old, the price of essential commodities went up, and people died in the thousands.<sup>69</sup> Even in his old age, Bhasani remembered the "famine." He called this the "most remembered thing of his childhood", and acknowledged it as the catalytic event that precipitated his commitment to help poor people. It should be noted that because his father's death preceded his grandfather's, and according to custom, Chaga was deprived of his father's property, which after his grandfather's death, went to his uncle.<sup>70</sup> In Bengal, orphans, even when they came from a well to do family, because of the lack of government support, were placed at the bottom of society. Deprived of his father's

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

inheritance, Chaga in a matter of a few years was thrown “into the rank of the have-nots.”<sup>71</sup>

Chaga remembered people’s apprehension when the famine started but he did not yet know what life was like under these conditions. Soon, however, he experienced the “ugly face” of the food shortage. Interestingly though, “as a young and sensitive person,” Chaga noted that the famine did not affect everyone in the same way. He witnessed how the destitutes, the have nots, the day laborers, landless peasants, fishermen, potters and small businessmen were “dying of starvation.” He remembered the playmates with whom he had gone to school. Due to the scarcity of food, many of them died of hunger or came near death with their “skeleton-like figures.” But to his surprise, he also saw rich people and the “hoarders of goods”, who stocked more and more to make profits. He observed that there were some people in the community who continued to have good life. They were not affected by the famine. On the contrary, such people became richer. These were the *zamindars*, money lenders and businessmen.<sup>72</sup>

In 1898 Chaga was living with his uncle who had inherited his father’s property. The uncle admitted Chaga to a *Madrassa*. While doing his studies, he also had to take care of his uncle’s flock as a shepherd, when a moment of carelessness in his work led to severe humiliation by his cousin. He was hurt. The “independent- minded” Chaga now found himself unable to remain a burden on his uncle merely for the sake of food and lodging. Bhasani narrates later how the experience traumatized him. Under the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

circumstances; he was unable to concentrate on his studies and thus decided to leave his uncle's house.<sup>73</sup>

Chaga left his uncle in 1898 at the age of 13. He adopted different professions to survive living on his own, on the street. He experienced the life of an "independent" person, spending many days working for other people for food and shelter. He spent nights in fishermen's boats on the Jamuna River and caught fish with them. He worked with peasants as a day labourer, sometimes going hungry because of his inability to buy food. During this time, he traveled from one village to another as a free man, without any one to dictate him or to guarantee his subsistence. According to him, he took shelter in the homes of many people, both well known and unknown working as a day-laborer for them.<sup>74</sup>

Feroz -al-Mujahid, an associate of Bhasani, says Chaga, despite many misfortunes in early life, was fortunate however to inherit a good health. During this time, he was also involved in Bengali rural sports, to playing with sticks and clubs with his fellow young people. He also was involved actively in *Jatra* (rural drama), and *kobi* (rural song). He was a good actor, could sing, and became recognized as a good *kobial* (poetry reciter). During this time, the themes of the *Kobita* (poems) in rural Bengal were about the British and their *zamindar*'s atrocities in rural Bengal.<sup>75</sup>

It seems that Chaga got his first anti-imperialist lesson early in life in his role as a *kobial* in rural Bengal. During this time, as one might expect, due to the lack of any guidance from his parents or anybody else, Bhasani became "restless and

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*



uncontrollable.” The early helplessness left a permanent imprint that may have shaped the nature of his political thinking and directed him towards the welfare of the helpless humanity. His willingness to survive with courage is a noteworthy characteristic.

#### Bhasani in Assam: the Sufi Training

In 1901 at the age of 16, Chaga met *pir* Nasir uddin Bagdadi. Chaga was working mainly as a day-laborer when he encountered the *pir*. As Irfanu Bari states:

It was destiny that one day Chaga was in a boat in the Jamuna River near Hossainpur, Sherajgong when he met *the pir* who came to visit a follower in the village. The *pir* who came originally from Bagdad arrived in Sherajgonj on his way to Assam via Mymensing. Nasiruddin settled in Joleshar, Assam, where he helped people and gave shelter to orphans. He learned that Chaga Mia was an orphan.<sup>76</sup>

Maksud narrates what Bhasani (Chaga) told him that he was only 14 years old. The *pir* instead of calling him Chaga Mia, called him by his formal name, Abdul Hamid. Bagdadi also took him to Assam on the same day.<sup>77</sup> In Assam, Chaga worked as a servant of Bagdadi responsible for making shoes. He was a cobbler. Soon finding him hardworking and noticing his devotion to religious spirituality, Bagdadi taught him Arabic and Urdu.<sup>78</sup>

Maksud says as guardian and spiritual teacher Bagdadi helped Abdul Hamid learn Bengali in *Patshala* (elementary school). He also helped Abdul Hamid through private instruction in the *Quran, Hadith* and *Fiqh*.<sup>79</sup> Bhasani also learnt Persian. He developed

<sup>75</sup> Feroz-al-Mujahid, Mawlana Bhasanir Jibon O Dharsan (Mawlana Bhasani's Life and Philosophy), (Dhaka: Abdul Mannan, 1982), p. 18-19.

<sup>76</sup> My interview of Irfanul Bari in Santosh revealed similar information. Also see Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.14.

<sup>77</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.15

good relationships with the associates and followers of Nasiruddin, something that he was able to capitalize on later in life.<sup>80</sup>

Bhasani continued his studies under Bagdadi's supervision. Hasan Abdul Quayyum relates what he heard from Bhasani, "The Sufi master seeing Abdul Hamid's strong desire to learn and work, taught him *'Ilm-i tasawwuf*" or Sufi mystic knowledge. Quaiyyum says, "In that training there is a very special path of Sufi training called *Ittihád-i fayz (or fâ'iz)*. Quaiyyum estimates that "he must have attained a great spiritual power."<sup>81</sup>

Helal Uddin, Bhasani's spiritual disciple, adds to this a rather mysterious incident that he says marks Bhasani's transformation into a full time *pir*:

One noon time, I and Mawlana Bhasani were cultivating the land together with a plough. During this time, the *pir* came to us and started to walk by the running plough. Suddenly, he went to the front of the ploughed area and opened an iron stick from its cage forcefully, and took out two *ana*\* of coins, and dropped them as if he was spreading a bedcover over a bed. Bhasani stopped ploughing the land and quickly gathered all the coins. He touched Bagdadi's feet and said goodbye to him. The *pir* looking at Bhasani prayed to God for him. I stood still with the plough. The *pir* told me to stop working for now and go home. After that, Bhasani did not work in the field anymore and people started to visit him as a *pir*. However, Bhasani continued to acknowledge Bagdadi as his *pir*.<sup>82</sup>

Washasi says that Bagdadi *pir* Sahib was a great and learned Sufi of the *Qádiríyah tariqah* or order, founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qádir al-Jilání (1077-1166) who resided in Bagdad. This order believed in Hindu -Muslim unity and liked to work with the down- trodden. Bhasani followed the same *tariqah* or order. It

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Hasan Abdul Quayyum, *Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani)*. *op. cit.*, p. XVIII.

\* An *ana* is analogous to a penny. In other words an *ana* is comparable of a penny as a unit.

<sup>82</sup> Helal uddin is quoted in Mohammed Korban Ali "Smritita Mawlana Bhasani"(Mawlana Bhasani in my Memory) in Quayyamm (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani)*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

seems that Bhasani, as a Qádiríyah *pir*, became familiar with Sufi thoughts. However, it is not known at this time if he mastered the complex issues of *rubúbiyah* theosophical ideas in a non-traditional, political sense.

Bhasani also followed Chistia *tariqah*. *Tariqahs*, or the ways of the Sufis, are not water tight compartments. Mohammed Yahya Tamizi says:

Khwájah Abú 'Alí Isháq is the founder of the Chistia order in Chisht in Iran. Khaja Mu'in al-Dín Chishti of Ajmir is the founder of this order in India. The latter also had the opportunity of being introduced to Sheikh Abdul Qadr Jilani of Bagdad, the founder of the Qádriya order.<sup>83</sup>

One of the Chistia characteristics was that they worked with the poor. Khwájah Nizám al-Dín Awliyá' was another prominent figure in this order. Nasiruddin Bagdadi as a well connected *pir*, originally from Bagdad, must have known about the various *tariqahs* and passed this knowledge along to Bhasani. Bhasani often visited Chistia *pir* shrines, which reflects his familiarity and respect for those ways of the Sufis. Bhasani once said to Bari, while they were visiting the shrine of a Chistia *pir* in Pakistan:

Shaykh Faríd al-Dín Ganj-i Shikar's mausoleum is here. He is a great saint of the *Chistiya* order. He died about 700 years ago. Hazrat Qutb al-Dín Bakhtiyár Kákí was his teacher. Mainuddin Chisti himself taught him. He lived his life in simple manner with destitutes<sup>84</sup>.

Thus, Bhasani was aware and also in praise of the great *pirs* of the *Chistia tariqah* who dedicated their lives to the service of the poor and the destitutes.

Bhasani was with Bagdadi from 1901-1907. Bagdadi's last advice to Bhasani was not to involve him in "self promotion and self glory." He said "Stay away from self

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<sup>83</sup> Mohammed Yahya Tamizi, Sufi Movements in Eastern India (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, 1992) p.109.

<sup>84</sup> In Bhasani's last trip to Pakistan in the year 1970, Irfanul Bari was with him. After the speech, the Mawlana (Bhasani) said to the driver, "Let's go to the Mousoleum." Bari narrates the event. The moselium and the mosque are located on a relatively higher ground. As we got off the car

promotion and self glory in the way of a woman of integrity who does not display her beauty in public.”<sup>85</sup> This is a typical Qádiríyah Sufi expression. Bhasani’s commitment to serving the poor, as a Sufi virtue, was also learnt from Bagdadi. The education Bhasani had from Bagdadi, and his affection for the *pir* was such that, according to Shamsul Alam, Bhasani even named his first son Nasir, in memory of *pir* Nasiruddin Bagdadi.<sup>86</sup>

#### Bhasani in Deoband (1907- 1908)

In 1907 Bhasani was 22 years old. According to Maksud, recognizing Bhasani’s immense talent Bagdadi contacted Mawlana Mahmudul Hasan, commonly known as the Shaykh al-Hind to arrange for Bhasani’s further studies. Mahmudul Hasan was the Sadr Mudarris (principal) of the Deoband Madrasah. Deoband Madrassa was the leading institution of Islamic learning of the time. Deoband is located in UP (Uttar Pradesh) province about 90 miles from Delhi.

Esposito says about Deoband:

In India the decline of Mughal power had spurred a number of revivalist movements. Among the most influential was that of Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (1702-62) and his disciples. ...unlike Mohammed bin Abd al-Wahhab [of Saudi Arabia], Wali Allah’s surgery was less radical. Rather than reject the present to restore the past, he sought to modify the present belief and practice in light of early Islamic practices. Thus, he set out to reform or purify Sufism rather than suppress it.<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, this is one of the centres of the early revival movements in India started with Shah Wali Allah’s ideas. Sanyal says that, unlike the Wahabis of Arabia,

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Bhasani started saying “Ganjeer Shakar was a Chistia *pir* lived his life in simple manner with destitutes.”

<sup>85</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari, Bhasani: My Love, Santosh: Santi Press:1986.

<sup>86</sup> A. Z. M Shamsul Alam, “Mozlum Jononata Mawlana Bhasani” (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu’m Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, op. cit., p. 372.

<sup>87</sup> John J. Esposito. Islam and Politics (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), p. 33.

Shah Walli Allah's, the Deoband "*ullemah*" integrated Sufism into their lives. In their role as Sufi guides and masters, they sought to influence people to conform to the *Sunna* (ways of the Prophet) and emphasized aspects of Sufi beliefs and practices that reinforce the reformist message they sent out.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, the original Deobandis were both *ulama* and Sufis, offering "a composite" form of religious leadership.<sup>89</sup> It is noteworthy that despite Sayyid Ahmad Khan of Aligarh's friendship with Bagdadi, the latter chose Deoband instead of Aligarh for Abdul Hamid to do his studies.<sup>90</sup> Aligarh was a pro-British institution directed by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. His concerns remained primarily the education and welfare of the Muslim leaders. According to Maksud, the Dār al-'Ulūm of Deoband in those days was an "anti-imperialist centre of Islamic learning."<sup>91</sup> Its two main mottos were to fight against imperialism and spread welfare among the masses.<sup>92</sup> Mawlana Gangoli, Mawlana Mahmudul Hasan, and the Shaykh al-Hind, the chief patrons, were Sufi *ulama* and taught Sufism in Deoband; and they were opposed to Syed Ahmad's support of the British.<sup>93</sup>

Maksud says that Bhasani was educated about the Quran and the Hadith from Husayn Ahmad Madani<sup>94</sup> who was a colleague of Shaykh ul Hind. It is not clear from

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<sup>88</sup> Usha Sanyal, *Devotional. Islam Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilly and his movement, 1870-1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 38. (Emphasis added).

<sup>89</sup> Metcalf says "Boys who came to the school were provided their basic necessities. They lived modestly, and were expected to adhere to a serious schedule of discipline. They did not learn English or other "modern" subjects. They did use Urdu as a lingua franca, enhancing links among students from Bengal to Central Asia to the south. The '*ulama* who founded this school were above all specialists in prophetic *hadith*, the narratives which constitute the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and practices which serve either directly or analogously to guide every aspect of moral behavior. Their lives were meant to embody their teachings." Barbara D. Metcalf "Traditionalist" Islamic Activism. see [http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/metcalf\\_text\\_only.htm](http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/metcalf_text_only.htm) July 3, 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Maksud, *Bhasani, op. cit.*, p.64.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan, op. cit.*, pp. 43-45.

<sup>94</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p.15.

Bhasani's statements whether he was ever in the company of the Shaykh himself. Barbara Metcalf thinks that Deoband was not so much anti-imperialist. It only became involved in politics after World War 1 especially during the noncooperation movement by Gandhi.<sup>95</sup> It is possible that a section of its *ulama* were politically motivated. In this context Barbara D. Metcalf says:

What is perhaps most striking about the Deoband-type movements is the extent to which politics is an empty "box," filled expediently and pragmatically depending on what seems to work best in any given situation. Islam is often spoken of as "a complete way of life"-- arguably a modernist and misleading distinction from other historical religious traditions -- so that political life must be informed by Islamic principles. In fact, as these movements illustrate, virtually any strategy is accepted that allows the goal of encouraging what are defined as core, shari'a-based individual practice, coupled with a range of mundane goals that may or may not be explicit -- from protection of life and property, to social honor and political power, to the dignity that comes from pious adherence to what are taken as divine commands.<sup>96</sup>

It is possible that Bhasani became aware of the Sheikh's anti-imperialist ideas from his time in Deoband. Maksud describes the Sheikh as an anti-imperialist Islamic thinker and follower of Shah Wali Allah. His philosophy stressed the political, social, and economic liberation of the people. Irfanul Bari wrote that "From 1907-09 he [Bhasani] stayed in Deoband. In Deoband he had learned from Mahmudul-Hasan, *Fukka Kulle Nesamin*- "Destroy every existing structure."<sup>97</sup> Coming into contact with those thinkers must have further influenced Bhasani in the development of his political goal to fight against colonial rule in India. Part II of this thesis suggests that it was perhaps this type of

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<sup>95</sup> Barbara Metcalf, "Traditionalist Islamic Activism." *op. cit.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Irfanul Bari, "Bhasanir Rajniti Potobhumi" (The Background of Bhasani's Politics) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani, op. cit., p. 694.*

training that convinced him to work against the Pakistani military rulers (who were aligned with the US) while he aligned himself with the pro-China Maoist Communists.

Mawlana Ahmad Kathrada illustrating the motto of Deoband says: "The *ulama* of Deoband always stood for the truth and spoke the "*Haq*" (truth).<sup>98</sup> Bhasani during his political career often used the phrase "*Haq*."<sup>99</sup> He was never pretentious.

Bhasani did not graduate from Deoband. Bhasani's stay at Deoband was only 2 years, instead of the usual 6 years of training. It is not known what made him leave school so early, without completing the diploma. Did he see any contradiction of his already formed world views from Qádriya Sufism with that of Deoband's Naqshabandi? We do not know. Bhasani often spoke of the term *Wahdat-al Wujud*, unity of being, concept Sufi thinkers believe coined by the famous Sufi Ibn al Arabi.<sup>100</sup> It is my understanding that since Deoband emphasized the Naqshabandi order, "*Wahdat-al-Shuhud*" (apparentism) by Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband and Sheikh Ahmad of Sirhind, challenged the theory of "*Wahdat-al -Wujud*", Bhasani, as a strong believer of "*Wahdat-al -Wujud*" perhaps did not find it interesting to continue his studies at Deoband. Ahmad Hossain Amin Jung, in his book *Falsafa-i-Faquard*, explains the difference between *Wahdat-al-wujud* and *Wahdat-ush-shuhud*.<sup>101</sup> In section 2 of this chapter we will see Bhasani's ideas have more similarities with *Wahdat-al-wujud*. We have no non-Bengali

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<sup>98</sup> Mawlana Ahmad Kathrada, "An eye-witness account of 150 years Deoband conference", <<http://www.jamiat.org.za/al-jamiat/june/sreport.html>> March 24, 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Bhasani in addition to his use of the word as a common vocabulary even named one of the popular weeklies he founded in Santosh as "Haq Khota."

<sup>100</sup> Ibn Arabi, as I have indicated in the text, apparently did not coin the term "*wahdat al-wujúd*," nor did he employ it - - though others later used the term to characterise his thought, so there is a tendency to attribute it to him.

<sup>101</sup> For more on this philosophical debate see Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, pp. 201-203. The illustration is translated and quoted in Anwarul Haq, *The Faith Movemome of Mawlana*

**Table 3: Differences between *Wahdat-al-wujud* and *Wahdat-ush-shuhud*:**

<i>Wahdat-al-wujud</i>	<i>Wahdat-al-shuhud</i>
(He is the Whole, Complete)	(He is the guide)
View: Everything is Him or in everything is He	View: Everything is from Him
Mystical Inclination: Inclined toward calmness,	Mystical Inclination: Inclined towards turbulence,
I and He are not separate (If he is ocean, I am a drop)	I am with Him and He is with me
Union	Love
Belief: Who am I? I am the Truth (Gnostic)	Belief: Who am I? I am His Servant

Source: The above illustration is translated and quoted in Anwarul Haq, *The Faith Movement of Mawlana Mohammed Ilyas* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1972), p. 26, from Ahmad Hossain Amin Jung, in his book *Falsafa-i-Faquard*, p. 263

source available that might dispute Deoband's influences over Bhasani's life. Maksud says:

“With Mahmudul Hasan's blessings, after two years in Deoband he returned to his spiritual teacher Bagdadi in Assam.”<sup>102</sup>

Bazlus Satter, a long-time associate of Bhasani says that “He studied the Quran and the *Sunnah* under the guidance of Hussain Ahmad Madni. The Deoband revolutionary education went into his deep consciousness.”<sup>103</sup> I interviewed Bazlus Satter, in Chittagong, Bangladesh in 1995. He believes that Deoband's anti-imperialist thinking played an important role in the shaping of Bhasani's thought.<sup>104</sup>

Saiful Islam concludes from his observation that Bhasani retained the two main lessons learned during the Deoband period: the opposition to imperialism and the

Mohammed Ilyas (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1972), p.26 from Ahmad Hossain Amin Jung, in his book *Falsafa-i-Faquard*, p. 263.

<sup>102</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>103</sup> Bazlus Satter, “Samokalin Rajnitir Ovibavok Mawlana Bhasani” (The Guardian of Contemporary politics) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani)*, op. cit., p. 353.

<sup>104</sup> I have interviewed Bazlus Satter in July at Chittagong, Bangladesh in 1995 and had chance to do cross- checking of many information found in other works.



commitment to work for the welfare of people.<sup>105</sup> There is no document showing whether Bhasani was in the company of Ubayd Allah Sindhi or other famous scholars of Deoband and his encounter with them about his philosophical differences. However, Syed Irfanul Bari contends that in addition to his association with Hossain Ahmad Madani, Bhasani was in the company of other scholars.<sup>106</sup> About his education Bhasani says: "I do not have much of an institutional education. I have learnt from Nasiruddin Bagdadi, my *pir* in Joleshar of Assam, and in Deoband from Hussain Ahmad Madani also I have learnt something."<sup>107</sup> Taking all this circumstantial evidence into account we can conclude with some certainty that Bhasani's training at Deoband did not help him lose the *Wahdat-al Wujud* ideas he had learnt from Bagdadi of *Qádiriya* order and from Deoband he learnt the anti-imperialist training. Thus, his time in Deoband also played an important educational role in his life.

In 1909, Bhasani went to Tangail of Mymensing where Bagdadi had another house. Armed with his newly earned Deoband education Abdul Hamid became a primary school teacher in Tangail. During this time, in addition to his teaching, he also gave sermons, helped people in need and eventually became known locally as a *pir* himself. In later years from time to time Bhasani returned to Tangail to his people to teach in a Madrasa.

In 1909 Bhasani was 24 years old. He was restless and not happy with anything for a long time. From 1909 to 1913 he belonged to a secret revolutionary group in

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<sup>105</sup> Saiful Islam, *Shadhinata, Bhasani, Bharat* (Independence, Bhasani, India), *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>106</sup> Irfanul Bari said this in an interview I had with him in 1995 at Santosh.

<sup>107</sup> Irfanul Bari, "Pakistanee Mawlana Bhasanir Shes Safar" (Mawlana Bhasani's Last Trip to Pakistan) in Quayyum (ed.), *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani)*, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

Calcutta. A young man named Mokles from Brahmobaria, in present Bangladesh, advised him to join this secret revolutionary group working in underground politics. It should be noted that these leftist Indian nationalist groups, known as *Anushilan Samiti* (Gymnastic society), led by revolutionary-minded Hindus had a powerful presence in mainly anti-British Calcutta, India. It was very unusual though, for Bhasani, an *alim*, to join the group. It appears that he found in the secular-minded leftist group the same spirit he had seen among the Deoband followers who were, noncommunal and anti-British. And it should be noted that Deobandi *ulama* were working all along with the Hindus in the freedom struggle.<sup>108</sup> According to Bhasani's own accounts, when he was with them he burned the granaries of money lenders, and helped the group to raise money for their activities. In the Kishorganj and Sherpur subdivision he participated in a couple of *Anushilan* raids, in the form of robbery, but he claimed that he never took a personal initiative in any killing. Around 1913 he left the group. He says he left the group on the advice of Muhammad Ali, a prominent leader of the *Khilafat* movement.<sup>109</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari notes that Bhasani often said: "It was Muhammed Ali's inspiration that led me to join the Congress Party."<sup>110</sup> Bhasani worked with Muhammed Ali as a political worker<sup>111</sup>

In 1911 an anti-partition movement led to surge in serious communal politics between Hindus and Muslims. He did not join in any of these communal Bengal politics

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<sup>108</sup> Maksud, op. cit. p. 16. Also see Al Jamiat, <<http://www.darululoom-deoband.com/english>> March 24, 2003.

<sup>109</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari, "Bhasani Rajnitir Potobhumi" (The Background of Bhasani's Politics) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani*, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, op. cit. p. 698.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 694-699.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 698. His respect of Mohammed Ali was demonstrated in 1957 when he named a college in Kagmari, Tangail after Mohammed Ali, the famous *Khilafat* leader of India.

of partition. It is noteworthy that Bhasani's non-communal stand is evident in these early events. From 1915 to 1917, Bhasani again returned to Tangail to teach in a *Madrassa*.

Moshiur Rahman says:

Mawlana [Bhasani] used to be the *alim* of a village *Madrassa* by the river bank of Padma. His salary was 50 *paisa* a month. He would teach children in the morning and at night, in a backward village that did not even have electricity. He lived among uneducated, superstitious village people that had to fight against the *zamindar's* oppression. This was the environment in which he lived. This is the foundation of his experience.... Through these activities, this unknown village Mawlana turned into the famous Mawlana Bhasani, the huge political figure.<sup>112</sup>

In 1917, for an unknown reason Bhasani went to Panch Bibii, Bogra, in present day Bangladesh. There, he drew the attention of Samsuddin, the *zamindar* of Bogra. Finding Bhasani to be an honest person, the *zamindar* made him his deputy. He also hired him to tutor his children. Besides his work in Bogra, he also travelled to Calcutta on different missions for the *zamindar*. During this time Bhasani had the opportunity to attend the meetings of great Congress leaders like Surendra Nath Benarjee and Bipin Chandra Pal. According to Bhasani, he heard their anti-British speeches and was impressed by them.<sup>113</sup>

Bhasani said about the Congress Party that during this time, "Agitation was the talk of the day." Dadabhai Nauroji, a famous Congress Party leader from Bombay, at the Calcutta Session of the Congress Party, urged people to use agitation as a political tool.

A. J. Rajput says:

"Agitation" is the life and soul of the whole political, social and industrial history of England... The whole parliament, press and platform is simply all agitation. Agitation is the civilized peaceful weapon of moral force infinitely preferable to brute physical force. When possible ... agitate; agitate means to

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<sup>112</sup> Moshiur Rahman, "Mawlana Amader Oitejjo" (Mawlana is our Tradition) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>113</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

inform. Inform the Indian people what their rights are and why they should get them, and inform the British citizens of the rights of the Indian people, and let them know why they should grant it to them. If we do not speak, they say we are satisfied, if you speak you become agitators! The contradiction is that the Indian people are asked to act constitutionally, while that is the case, the government itself remains unconstitutional and despotic.<sup>114</sup>

Bhasani learned the political tool of agitation, to be used in his later political career, from these Congress leaders.

The 33rd session of the Indian Congress Party took place in Calcutta in 1917. In that same year Bhasani formally joined the Congress Party. He was 32 years old. Before that time, he had been mainly an observer or involved in politics on a part time basis. Now he became a political worker for Mawlana Azad and the Ali Brothers (Mawlana Muhammad Ali and Mawlana Shawkat Ali).<sup>115</sup>

World War 1 began in 1914. During the Great War the Turks fought on the side of the Germans and were the first to be defeated by the Allies. After the war the European powers divided the caliphate. The Indian Muslim masses under the leadership of Mohammed Ali and Shawkat Ali were demanding that the British support the "Muslims in general and Muslim powers like the Ottomans in particular." At the same time Hindu leaders started a campaign for the immediate declaration of Home Rule.<sup>116</sup> Rajput says:

The question of the *Khilafat* was dear to an Indian Muslim more than anything else at that time. For the Muslims it was essential to have a religious head or *Khalifah* possessing complete independence and authority in his person. It was further considered necessary in the Islamic administrative organization that the whole of the Muslim community should stand united behind this *Kalifah*, to obey his orders without raising any objections, and to fight the destructive powers of the enemies of Islam with utmost efforts.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> A. B. Rajput, Mawlana Abdul Kalam Azad (Lahore: Lion Press, 1957), p. 340.

<sup>115</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.20.

<sup>116</sup> Rajput, Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

In 1919 Gandhi led his first all India agitation, known as the *Satyagraha* Movement.<sup>118</sup> To the Indian Muslims the *Khilafat* movement was purely an Islamic movement, and the Congress Party, in acceptance of the legitimacy of its objective, joined the Muslims under the leadership of Gandhi.<sup>119</sup>

During this time he may have visited Gandhi's Ashram.

Once I went to Gandhiji's Wordha Assaram. After staying in Wordha Assaram for three days, I could not make sense of what is non-violence. Then one day, I asked Gandhiji, "If someone forcefully abducts my married wife then if I say to the abductors: 'what are you doing, she is my wife', is the abductor going to change his mind?" he questioned. Bhasani narrated this story in public meetings many times and at the conclusion of his story he said 'Until now, I have said non-violence is the best way, this time I am saying hate stealing, hate corruption, hate the exploiter-oppressor, hate imperialism, hate feudalism, hate, hate, and hate'.<sup>120</sup>

There is no specific date for Bhasani's visit to Gandhi's ashram. However, one can estimate that he was drawn there by his drive to learn about new things and to educate himself. While he generally appreciated Gandhi's non-violence movement, Bhasani found it "impractical". Regarding Bhasani's stand on non-violence Mohammed Hossain explains:

When a ferocious tiger attacks a human being, it is not normal to spare the tiger. But when human beings kill a tiger, he is acting in the role of a hunter killing an aggressor to bring peace. Imperialist countries with gun power in the same way profess the philosophy of non-violence...<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>120</sup> Mohammed Hossain, "Mawlana Bhasanike Jamon Dakeshe" (The Way I saw Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani* (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p.246, where Bhasani mentioned his experience to some of his followers which is recorded by Mohammed Hossain.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Hossain concludes “I think in reality, Bhasani’s philosophy of so-called violence is indeed a higher level of non-violence.”<sup>122</sup>

Bhasani’s understanding of *jihad* (struggle) is clear from the above description. He was like Gandhi in the sense of using a religious spirit in politics and in his identification with the downtrodden, but in terms of the means used to achieve the goals Bhasani was different. It seems that his approach was more in tune with the Islamic revolutionary tradition.

The *Khilafat* movement started in 1918 and ended in 1924. Mawlana Azad and Mawlana Mohammed Ali and Mawlana Shawkhat Ali were prominent leaders of the *Khilafat* movement. This was a time when due to the collapse of the Ottoman *Khilafat* many Muslims were depressed at the setback. Bhasani worked as a political worker.<sup>123</sup>

Bhasani acknowledged that he was influenced by Azad. Azad published al-Hilāl, “a digest of profound reading on the government, law, ethics, philosophy and religion.” Azad propagated the study of the Quran as a basic necessity for the “political, social, and cultural reconstruction of his countryman.”<sup>124</sup> It was important for Bhasani. In the newspaper Azad referred to the Prophet that used to pray: “O God, I bear witness that all people are brothers to one another. Differences they might have created amongst themselves, but you have united them together with a single bond of humanity.” Azad said,

Just as the monotheism of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad are facts to be believed by every Muslim, this also must not be denied that all human beings are brothers to one another. While promoting patriotism Islam strongly

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>124</sup> Rajput, Mawlana Abdul Kalam Azad, op. cit., pp.35-37.

opposes all communal and racial prejudices and speaks of them in terms of prejudgement and ignorance.<sup>125</sup>

Azad claimed that the Quran says: "All religions are right, but the followers of all of the religions have deviated from the right course." He quotes the Quran, "Religion does not preach animosity amongst us."<sup>126</sup>

Azad's influence was so strong that Mawlana Mahmudul Hasan of Deoband, Mawlana Shaukat Ali, Dr Iqbal, and Mawlana Mohammed Ali, (who was a staunch supporter of the Aligarh school), acclaimed the services of Al-Hilal and accepted the ideal of Azad.<sup>127</sup> Azad's ideal of Hindu –Muslim unity is called "synthetic nationalism." Mawlana Muhammed Ali and Shaukat Ali laid down their differences with Azad and began to demonstrate unity through their "newspaper, Comrade and Hamdard."<sup>128</sup> Bhasani's association, particularly with Azad and his familiarity with the interpretation of the Quran, the Hadith and his secular stand probably helped Bhasani to form his ideas.

Azad's al-Hilal was banned by the British government. Azad then opened al-Balagh. In 1916 Azad made the announcement in his weekly journal, al-Balagh, that he would publish an explanatory Urdu translation of the Qur'an, styled Tarjuman al —Quran. It is a translation with his interpretation of the first eight chapters of the Quran.<sup>129</sup>

Rajput says of Azad's Tarjuman al-Quran:

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>129</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, Tarjuman Al -Quran. (Bombay: Asia Publishong House, 1962), preface, p. xvii.

...a significant product of the age, and perhaps the most valuable contribution ever made to the field of Islamic studies by an Indian scholar. ... This work alone made Abul Kalam's name and fame spread over the entire Islamic world.<sup>130</sup>

It seems that Bhasani was familiar with the content of Azad's widely circulated Urdu newspapers. Azad says:

...the country at that hour was preparing itself for a huge political movement of noncooperation, notwithstanding my preoccupation in politics; a further demand was made on my time, by calling upon me to publish The Tarjumán al-Qur'an also. ... The Arabic text was first copied for the press and this was completed in November 1921....<sup>131</sup>

In this work, Azad talks among other things, the concept of *rubúbiyah*, (Divine Providence). *Rubúbiyah* is a concept used by Sufis and was one of the main concepts that Azad used to interpret the essentials of the Quran. Azad was a Sufi himself and had toured Egypt, Turkey, and Iraq and met scholars and Muslim revolutionaries of those countries where he must have become familiar with the concept *rubúbiyah*.<sup>132</sup> Bhasani had formally been a member of the Congress Party from 1917, but circumstantial evidence available from cross checking of sources shows that Bhasani must also have been in discourse with Azad from time to time.

As mentioned earlier, in 1920 the *Khilafat* committee participated in the noncooperation movement led by Gandhi who had promised *Swaraj* (India's self rule) within one year.<sup>133</sup> Thus, Muslims and Hindus were united on one point-which was that India should shake off British bondage as soon as possible.<sup>134</sup> Bhasani joined the *Khilafat* movement as a Congress Party member and worked with Azad and the Ali brothers.

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<sup>130</sup> Rajput, Mawlana Abdul Kalam Azad, op. cit., p53.

<sup>131</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, Tarjuman Al-Quran, op. cit., preface, p. xvii.

<sup>132</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, India Wins Freedom, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1959).

<sup>133</sup> Rajput, Mawlana Abdul Kalam Azad, op. cit. p. 53.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 67.



At this time leaders of all communities were arrested for civil disobedience and nonpayment of taxes. Gandhi and other prominent leaders were also arrested. During this time there was Mopla Muslim rebellion against Hindu zamindars and there were riots in *Chauri Chaura*. Gandhi hearing the news unexpectedly called off the Hindu-Muslim joint non cooperation movement, ignoring the roused passion of the masses asking for self rule and the protection of the *Khilafat* for the Muslims. This caused confusion and misunderstanding among Muslims and Hindus.

Faruqi says,

One is really at a loss to understand the mysterious decision of Gandhi to call off the movement at its peak. The noncooperators had been peaceful throughout. The *Chauri Chaura* riots were a solitary incident where the use of violence was made. ... It was shocking and the whole of India was petrified.<sup>135</sup>

Gandhi's calling off the joint movement sent shock waves all over India. He was blamed from all quarters. Jawaharlal Nehru says:

The sudden suspension of our movement after the *Chauri Chaura* incident was resented, I think by almost all the prominent Congress leaders-other than Gandhi of course...The younger people were naturally even more agitated. Our mounting hopes tumbled to the ground and this mental reaction was to be expected... If this was the inevitable consequence of a sporadic act of violence, than ...there was something lacking in the philosophy and technique of a nonviolent struggle for freedom.<sup>136</sup>

Nehru says: "He [Gandhi] was essentially a man of religion, a Hindu to the innermost depths of his being."<sup>137</sup> Nehru felt embarrassed by Gandhi's religious emphasis on the freedom movement. He says:

Gandhi was continually laying stress on the religious and spiritual side of the movement. His religion was not dogmatic, but it did mean a definitely religious outlook on life, and the whole movement was strongly influenced by this

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<sup>135</sup> Ziaul Hasan Faruqi. *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, op. cit., p.72.

<sup>136</sup> Recorded in Rajput, *Mawlana Abdul Kalam Azad*, op. cit., p.104.

<sup>137</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom* (New York: The John Day Company, 1942), p. 83.

and took on a revivalist character so far as the masses are concerned. The great majority of Congress workers naturally tried to model themselves after the leader and even repeated his language....

I used to be troubled sometimes at the growth of his religious element in our politics, both on the Hindu and the Muslm side. I did not like it at all.... Even some of Gandhiji's phrases sometimes jarred upon me-thus his frequent reference to Rama Raj a golden age which was to return.<sup>138</sup>

Gandhi said,

I claim that with us ... the *Khilafat* is the central fact, with Mawlana Mahomed Ali because it is his religion, with me because, in laying down my life for the Khilafat, I ensure safety of the cow that is my religion, from the Musalman knife.<sup>139</sup>

Gandhi's decision to call off the movement led to division within the Congress party. One faction was called "pro-change" (for immediate end to the British rule) and another "no change" (is to wait and see). Gandhi was for the latter. Bhasani remained with the "pro-change" group.

Bhasani was arrested in 1923. Due to his activities as a Congress Party worker, he, along with other Congress workers, was jailed in Calcutta's Dum Dum jail on charges of anti-state activities.<sup>140</sup> This marks Bhasani's first incarceration and it seems that along with Azad, Gandhi, and Nehru, Bhasani was also a leader who the British considered as dangerous.

The Gandhi's calling off of the noncooperation movement and the *Khilafat* movement led to the slow growth of "two unconscious trends" in the Hindu and Muslim religious communities. Faroqui states:

... The withdrawal of the movement was followed by the Shuddi and Sanghatan movements and the Hindu-Muslim riots in Multan and other places.

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71-72.

<sup>139</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Communal Unity*. (Ahmadabad: Navajivan, 1949), p. 26. Also quoted in Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Pakistan the formative period*, (Karachi, Pakistan Publishing House, 1960), p. 59.

<sup>140</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

The Sanghatan movement was led by Madan Mohan Malavi; the founder of the Banaras Hindu University. As a reaction to this, Muslims under the guidance of the *ulama* started a program of *tabligh*. The leader of this was a former Deobond alim.<sup>141</sup>

Bhasani had not joined any of the revivalist communal movements. He was still a member of the Congress Party. However, Bhasani's differences with Gandhi were evident. As mentioned earlier, he allied with the "pro change" group led by C. R. Das while Azad remained allied with Gandhi's "no change" faction.<sup>142</sup> During the period under review Bhasani seem to be drifting away from Azad's influence.

In 1923 after the end of the Hindu-Muslim united movement against the British, Muslims were further depressed and except Azad and a handful of them gradually lost touch with the Congress Party. Bhasani after his release from jail returned to his people in Tangail to resume teaching in Mymensingh's Haluaghat. Samsul Alam says "There students came to know him as a Deoband trained scholar. Bhasani was given the title "*Mawlana*" (our master) by his students in Tangail. He continued to stay in his touch with the leaders of the *Khilafat* movement."<sup>143</sup>

#### Bhasani with C. R. Das

Chittiya Ranjan Das was a Bengali charismatic non communal leader. In 1919 Bhasani met Das in Mymensingh at a Provincial Congress meeting. The whole family came to Mymensingh. Bhasani was impressed by the leader and developed immense respect at the noncommunal leadership of Das.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Farouqi, The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

<sup>142</sup> A. B. Rajput, Mawlana Abdul Kalam Azad, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>143</sup> A. Z. M. Shamsul Alam, "Mazlu'm Janoneta Mawlana Bhasani" (The Destitute Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, op cit., p. 372 .

<sup>144</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 23.

According to Irfanul Bari, "Once Bhasani was asked by a fellow traveller on his way to West Pakistan, "How did you learn politics?" The Mawlana replied, "Politics should be learned from the common men and the environment." Bhasani also said that he was indebted to C. R. Das for learning about politics.<sup>145</sup> In another occasion he said "It was C. R. Das who illuminated the flames of Hindu-Muslim Bengali nationalism. I remember him very clearly."<sup>146</sup>

Das was a great Bengali patriot who had respect for the Muslim community, sympathised with them and worked to remedy their backward condition. From 1921-22 Bhasani worked with him while he was in Ccutta, helping to distribute relief materials in flood affected areas of Bengal and Assam while organizing Provincial Congress Party conferences in Bengal. Das also developed the famous "Bengal pact," that allowed parity for underprivileged Bengali Muslims.<sup>147</sup> This resulted in differences of opinion between Das and Gandhi and Das formed his own *Sharajo Dal*, a faction of the Congress Party that was more supportive of the welfare of the impoverished Bengali peasants.<sup>148</sup> C. R. Das was often in opposition to the pro Gandhi Congress leaders on the question of Bengali Muslim rights.

Bhasani said that he had learned important lessons about politics from Das who was a great influence on his thinking. He often quoted a poem written by Das:

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<sup>145</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari, "Pakistanee Mawlana Bhasanir Shes Shafer (Maulama Bhasanir Last Trip To Pakistan", in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>146</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>147</sup> In 1923 C. R. Das signed a pact with Fazlul Haq, Suhrawardy and other Muslim leaders. This Pact known as the Bengal Pact provided gurantees for due representation of Muslims in politics and administration. The spirit of Hindu-Muslim reapproachment evaporated with the death of Das in 1925. For more details on this see: A View of a Nation, Bangladesh Towards 21<sup>st</sup> century, (Evolution of Medieval Bengal (1204-1757) Dhaka: Minstry of information, Government of Bangladesh, <<http://www.citechco.net/bangladesh/history.html>> May 15, 2003.

*"Ore Mon Hobai Hobee*

*Jodi pon Kore Takish*

*Sai Pon Robai Robee"*

"Oh my mind, if I have serious commitment to do something, without doubt, it will be materialized."<sup>149</sup> Bhasani said, "The poem seemed unimportant at first but when I thought about it deeply it was indeed a strong statement."<sup>150</sup>

During this time Bhasani worked with Das in the rural areas promoting the ideas of the *Sharajyo* version of the Congress Party. Das's independent stance in Bengal led him to play a pivotal role regarding Hindu-Muslim unity in Bengal.

This was a time of serious communal politics in the Congress Party at the same time Muslims losing of faith in the leadership of Gandhi. During this time, some prominent Congress Party Muslim leaders such as Iqbal, (known as the dreamer of Pakistan) and Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan) who were strong Congress Party supporters and believers of Hindu –Muslim unity became disenchanted with Gandhi's Hindu spiritualism and slowly drifted away from Congress. Bhasani remained with the Congress but with the C. R. Das section of the Congress. C. R. Das died in 1925.

In 1925 Bhasani was 40 years old. Against his previous determination to remain single and work hard all his life for the people, now with the death of C. R. Das, he decided to leave politics and get married to start a family.<sup>151</sup> Thus, he returned to Bogra, got married to Alima Khatun. At the time, Alima Khatun was only eighteen years old. In

<sup>148</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-23.

<sup>149</sup> Mahfuzullah, "Mawlana Bhasanir Rachana Prosanghe" (Regarding Mawlana Bhasani's works) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, *op. cit.* p.600.

<sup>150</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p.29.

1926, with his newly married wife, he left for Dubri in Assam to settle and start a normal family life.<sup>152</sup>

After Das's death he did not join Gandhi's *Satyagrah* movement between 1930-31 nor in the "Quit India" movement of 1942, in which Gandhi had the support of the *zamindars*.<sup>153</sup> He found it difficult, to work with *zamindars* in Assam and Bengal, who were also powerful Congress Party supporters. Bhasani had served the peasant's interests.<sup>154</sup> Bhasani inherited his *pir* Bagdadi's constituency, the Sufi followers who were largely the peasants of Bengal and Assam.

In 1926, while in Dubri in Assam, Bhasani received a message that the *zamindar* of Tangail was oppressing his subjects. His self-imposed exile and desire for a peaceful family life in Assam did not last long. Despite his noncommunal stance, he once again became active against religious persecution. He got involved again in politics in opposition to a *zamindar* who refused to allow Muslims to eat beef, or wear beards and who imposed other forms of oppression. During this time Bhasani's protest against the *zamindars* in favour of the peasants is popularly known as Krishak Proja Andolan.

In 1926, the *zamindar* successfully persuaded the British to officially expel Bhasani from Bengal with his family.<sup>155</sup> After this, he took shelter in the forest of Gargari in Assam accompanied by his followers.<sup>156</sup>

There was no information on the specific date of Bhasani's leaving the Congress Party. English sources recorded the activities of Azad, Muhammed Ali and C. R. Das but

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Maksud, Bhasani, op. cit., pp.68-69.

<sup>154</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p 23.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

not Bhasani's. This is perhaps because Bhasani was not yet a prominent figure. Indeed, Bhasani said that he was merely a political worker for the three of them.<sup>157</sup> However, Bengali sources show that Bhasani was very much involved with them during these turbulent times of Indian history.

From the above analysis the following aspects of Bhasani's life until he was 44 are especially striking:

- (1) He felt that he personally suffered from the Bengal famines that were a result of the excessive exploitation of the peasants by the East India Company in rural Bengal.
- (2) He was known by a number of different names. He did a lot of different things. He was on his own for periods; he was also intensely involved with various religious teachers, secular leaders, political groups, and social movements. The variety seems to indicate an unwillingness to be just a follower.
- (3) He remained his own person. He had no real career. He remained an apprentice for a long time. He did not get married until 40 years of age. He lived in various places and was identified with various causes but at the end went back to his people in East Bengal.

It is true that from 1857-1922, India went through a tumultuous period. The Indian Revolt of 1857 was followed by the end of the Moghuls, then World War 1 followed by the end of the Ottoman *Khilafat*, and Gandhi's non-cooperation and the failure of the *Khilafat* movement of the Indian Muslims. This is a time when traditional

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Sufis perhaps still thought things could not be changed; Muslims should still try to build the Khilafat. But during this time of dramatic change, some of which Bhasani personally witnessed, many of the the old world fatalistic beliefs of the Sufis were questioned. There were also historical events that led to thoughts and anxieties that things could be changed only if efforts were made. Bhasani must have realized that change in the lot of the Bengali people was possible, which explains his intense commitment to his cause.

In Calcutta, Bhasani worked with political leaders, sometimes as an observer and other times as a participant, in the end, his was a uniquely Bengali Sufi experience. Thus, after Das's death his world view was not represented by any political party, and not by Azad's, Gandhi's, or Jinnah's ideas. However, unlike most Sufis of his time he felt responsible to serve people and to serve justice by entering politics with a different type of interpretation of religion in politics.<sup>157</sup> Unlike Mawlana Ilyas's faith movement or Abul Aala Mawdudi's Islamic Umma revivalist movements, Bhasani's was his fight for establishing justice in society. It is to note that Tablighi Jamá'at founded by Mawlana Ilyas (1885-1944) or later on in Jam'at-a- Islami by Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979)<sup>159</sup> were Bhasani's contemporaries. Despite the change in his views to get involved again in active politics, Bhasani did not leave his Sufi roots and his use of religion in Politics.

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>158</sup> Azad was born in an aristocrat Muslim family of Arab and Indian descent. He was first educated in Nizam Madrassa and later in Al Azhar. He traveled to Turkey, Iraq and Iran and other Muslim countries and had contacts with the scholars of those countries.<sup>158</sup> Later on he joined the Congress Party as a leader. Unlike Azad, Bhasani was born in rural Bengal and as an orphan educated by Nasiruddin who served the poor and the destitute peasants. Following the advice of his teacher Bhasani went to Deoband and later joined the Congress but continued to serve Bengali peasants who suffered at the hands of the oppressive zamindars. Although both of them had Sufi background Bhasani had more rural touch than Azad's.

<sup>159</sup> Mumtaz Ahmad, "Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: The Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat of South Asia" in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalism Observed* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 457-530.



## SECTION 2: BHASANI'S POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Bhasani took *rubúbiyah* as the main concept of his ideas in his fight for justice for the Bengali peasants. The literal meaning of *rubúbiyah* is lordship. Bhasani used this idea to his understanding of different issues about politics and religion.

### *Rubúbiyah* and Anti communalism

*Rubúbiyah* comes from the core word *Rabb* which in the Quran means "the Lord", Mawlana Azad taking verses from the Quran explains that God is "the sustainer", "the supporter."<sup>160</sup> Generally speaking, Sufis seek to internalize the attributes of God. Following this stream of thought some Sufis such as the Quádriya and Chishtiya find in this attribute the urgency of helping the needy as a duty to God. Bhasani said that "Savaie Porom Dharma", service to humanity, is the most important religion. He said for this one is required to have a revolution in the mind. To Bhasani becoming educated entailed being aware of the *rubúbiyah* principles, which were also a means by which to practice morality, to be upright and to be conscious of *jihad*.<sup>161</sup> Quoting from the Quran Bhasani says, "*la hu ma fissamawata wa ma fil ard*," (whatever is there on this earth is owned by God). Bhasani asserted, "As the servant of God we will share the resources of the country equally."<sup>162</sup>

These ideas of Bhasani it seems have their origin in the very first verse of the Quran which sums up the concept of Almighty God. He is described as the creator of all with the worlds, "*rabb al-'álimin*."

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<sup>160</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjuman Al-Quran*, op. cit. pp. 1-5.

<sup>161</sup> Hasan Abdul Quayyum, *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani* (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, op. cit., p.xxi.

<sup>162</sup> Mofizul Islam, *Upomohadesher Rajniti O Baiktitya*.(Politics and Personality of the Subcontinent) (Bengali), (Dhaka: The Printing House, 1994), p.43.

*Surah Fatiha* is a prayer “praising the Lord of all Being, in serving God alone...”

<sup>163</sup> The Sura exclaims,

Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all being  
 The all –merciful, the All –compassionate  
 The Master of the Day of Doom.  
 Thee only we serve: to Thee alone “do we ask for help”.  
 Guide us in the straight path,  
 The path of those whom Thou hast blessed  
 Not of those against whom Thou are wrathful. Not of those who are astray.<sup>164</sup>

In the Quran *Rabb* refers to an attribute of the Almighty, The Divine Being. *Sura Fatiha* says that God is not the Lord of Muslims alone, but the Lord of all being. Generally the Sufis also use other suras from the Quran. Surah iii, 44 God is my lord (*Rabb*) and your Lord (*Rabb*). Surah xviii, 13: "Our Lord (*Rabb*) is the lord of the heavens and the earth". To Bhasani following the Quran human beings are the representatives of the “*rabb al-'ālimin*”, on this earth.<sup>165</sup>

Bhasani seem to have started using these Quranic ideas during his days in Assam. During that time he reiterated his philosophy saying the Quranic verse as God's ordinance that “*la hu ma fissamawata wa ma fil ard*”. – Whatever is there in the universe and on the earth belongs to God. Bhasani said “As a creation of God we will enjoy the wealth legally and equally.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Sheila McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity, A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdudi*. (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1984).

<sup>164</sup> A.J. Arburry, *The Qur'an Interpreted* (London, Oxford University Press, Reprinted 1975). Surah 1.

<sup>165</sup> Maksud, *Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 680.

<sup>166</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 451.

Mawlana Azad in his Tarjuman Al -Quran explained the concept of *rubúbiyah* in detail by devoting an entire chapter to it. He begins with *Sura Fatiha*, saying *Sura Fatiha*, as the first chapter of the Quran, is but a detailed commentary of the concentrated substance that it contains; that it gives out in an epitomized form the fundamental objectives of the faith so elaborately explained upon in the rest of the Quran.<sup>167</sup> Azad says:

The *hamd* or praise over, the *Surat* draws attention to the all encompassing providence of God, His mercy and His justice; and thus gives a comprehensive picture of divine attributes which operate to provide man with all that he needs to sustain and develop the humanity in him and prevent him from going down in the scale of life. And then, calling God *rabb al-'álimín*, the Lord of all creation or of all forms of life, the *Surat* desires him to acknowledge the universal character of divine concern for every individual, group, community, country and every form of existence. The concept puts an end to all notions of exclusiveness which had hitherto prevailed among mankind assigning divine blessings and favours to one's own community.<sup>168</sup>

Azad interprets *rubúbiyah* to mean providence and *rabb* to mean nourisher. For Azad, "Since the need for Nourishment is one of the basic needs of human life, the meaning given to the term *Rabb* as Providence or Nourisher may be regarded as a natural first approach to God..."<sup>169</sup>

The word *Rabb* appears in the Quran, but not *rubúbiyah*. It is an abstract concept of Sufi origin denoting lordship. Azad uses the word *Rabubiat* (sic) in Urdu, instead of the Arabic *rubúbiyah* to mean the same thing, continuous process of providing one with all that is needed in every situation and at every stage. In other words God, as *Rabb* nourishes or provides people because of his Mercy or "*rahmah*." Bhasani says "God did not make anything without a plan. God, by being the lord not only created us but also

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<sup>167</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, Tarjuman Al Quran, op. cit, p. 6.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

sustains us as well. This is the principle of “*rabubiat*” (sic).<sup>170</sup> It is true that *rubúbiyah* is an invented word, an imaginative Sufi expansion, on *Rabb*. Therefore, it has a theosophical and speculative meaning. Azad did not say anything about *rubúbiyah* and its relationship to *jihad*, but Bhasani did. In 1974, he published a booklet with the title Rabubiyater Bumika (The Role of Rubúbiyah). In this he leaves a few written traces which are worthy of close attention. In this work he briefly discusses Islamic ethics of social justice and outlines three elements with its connection to *jihad*: (1) the nature of God, (that the *Rabb* is the Lord of the universe); (2) God’s relationship with the human beings; and (3) man’s duty to God and his creatures.<sup>171</sup> The organizing principle of this work is the concept of *rubúbiyah*. In this Bhasani purported to offer an explanation of and justification for God’s relationship with human beings.

To Bhasani after realizing the nature of God, teachings in the Quran could be divided into “two parts.”<sup>172</sup> *Huqúq Allah* -duty to God as a private responsibility. [This includes] the *salat*, the fasting, *haj* and *zakát* (following Islamic Sharia) and the second part is *Huqúq al-‘ibád* [:] duty to man, [the] social part of the teaching. ...the holy Quran makes performance void and invalid when duty to man is ignored or is not duly performed.”<sup>173</sup> Mohammed Abduh’s interpretation of *Huqúq Allah* and *Amalat* which emphasizes (a) laws having to do with *‘ibadat*, which refer purely to devotion (observing

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>170</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, “Silver Line” Bhasani edited *World Peace*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>172</sup> Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Rububiyater Bumika (The Role of Rububiyah) (Santosh: Hukumate Rabbáni Samiti Publications, 1974). Similar ideas are also explained by Abul Hashim a contemporary of Bhasani in Bhasani-edited *World Peace*, 1975, p. 6.

<sup>173</sup> Quoted in Mohammed Hosain Khan, “Mawlana Bhasanike Jamon Dakechee” (The Way I saw of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu’m Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani,

the five pillars of Islam such as five prayer times, fasting in the month of Ramadan, *haj*, *jakat and jihad*) and (b) interactions in social intercourse.

It is to note that this division is a common one among some Muslim scholars. However, Bhasani's understanding may be the same [of course] was to assert that Divine duty /common piety would not avail without social consciousness and action –his interpretation of *Huqúq al-'ibád*. The Quranic verse he used to support his teaching likewise emphasizes social responsibility over empty ritual,

Do you see the one who believes religion? Such is the one who is inimical to the orphans and encourages not the feeding of the indigent. So woe to the prayer performers who are neglectful of their prayers, those who make a show and refuse neighborly needs. (S C11:V.1-7)<sup>174</sup>

The other important concept Bhasani used was *Hukúmat-i-Rabbáni* (lordly government or rule), to characterize the divine ethical order, as opposed to *Hukúmat-i-nafsányiat*, the order of the tyrants or selfish, materialist persons. (*Nafs* refers, in Islamic and Sufi parlance, to the lower, appetitive soul that must be tamed and controlled in order for the adept to attain spiritual enlightenment). The key idea is that the earthly order is accountable to a higher order, and when the former – *Hukúmat-i-nafsányiat*– violates the latter – *Hukúmat-i-Rabbáni*, the responsibility of Godly people is to get involved in removing tyranny. It seems that he objected to people who think passively, and who refuse to become engaged in the struggle.

For Bhasani the *Hukúmat-i-Rabbáni* state is not a theocratic Islamic state, which rigidly applies Islamic law, but a Godly government where people will not starve.

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(The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 239. records his speech given in 1970 in the coastal region of Bangladesh.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

It emphasizes the purity of character of the rulers, which for him affects the entire population. Only people with purity of heart can establish God's kingdom. Thus, his was "Sufism in action" which is characterized by faith, practices, humility, gratitude, poverty, patience and generosity."<sup>175</sup> To Bhasani, *Hukumat-i nafsányiat* is the order of the tyrant. *Naf* means soul. *Hukumat-i nafsányiat* is about selfhood, ego-centricity, referring to a kind of mental or spiritual poverty. Here Bhasani understood the soul as tending to evil, seeking physical desire or mental desire.<sup>176</sup> Bhasani brought a Sufi ascetism to his understanding of the political meaning of *nafsányiat*. He conceived of his duty as service to God and service to humanity, thus although he was a Sufi, he was against the perception of passivity. This type of understanding gives his thought some structure. Based on these ideas it will be seen Bhasani formed his vision of politics as piety – a Sufi virtue. This type of thinking informed his political commitment to changing the fate of his people. In this short work, duty is explained as the struggle of the godly people to battle against tyranny, for if not checked, there will be human suffering. To Bhasani only by keeping tyranny in check, will there be world peace in God's Kingdom, or *rubúbiyah*.

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Another source of his ideas is a journal edited by Bhasani himself. The title of the journal is World Peace.<sup>178</sup> It is an important document written in English dealing in brief

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<sup>175</sup> James Fadiman and Robert Frager (ed.) Essential Sufism (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997).

<sup>176</sup> Psychology of the soul based in the Quran says that wear down your soul, making suffer, not to think oneself as a great person.

<sup>177</sup> Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Rabubiyater Bumika (The Role of Rububiyah) (Bengali), (Santosh: Hukamati Rabbáni Samiti, 1974), p. 8. For more details Maksud's Bhasani, op. cit. p.509-510, 516. Also Shamsul Alam's "Haqqul Ebad and Peace" in Bhasani (ed.) World Peace, vol. 11, number 2, (Santosh: Santosh Press, March 1975).

<sup>178</sup> Mawlana Bhasani, "Silver Line," in Mawlana Bhasani (ed.) World Peace, Vol. 11, Number 2, March 1975.

with how to bring world peace. In this journal, short articles written by Bhasani and others support the same claims. Bhasani's article "Silver Line" does not deal so much with the theoretical aspect of his ideas. He underlines his point rather heavily with the dichotomy of good vs evil. He says that both Socialist as well as monopoly capitalism failed to solve human problems because of their lack of spiritualism or greed. He believes that only Islam can do it through establishing justice.

Bhasani's *Qádriya tariqua* in which he belong sins are fought and overcome by self denial and service to the poor. Quadriyas are also famous for their tolerance for other religions. In this journal, the articles do not deal with details about economic policies and political processes, but rather focuses on Sufi ideal of morality and ethics. It would seem that these more prosaic considerations might have made his arguments more powerful but it is understandable that as a Sufi pir-political leader, his idea was more ethical in nature. What were expressed in Bhasani's article in the journal are his eloquence and his commitment to a vision shaped by his deep empathy for the dispossessed. Indeed his idea is that "the purpose of his action" was to establish justice in society.

Bhasani often referred to the Prophet and the Early Caliphs as examples of "savok," servers of people on which he tried to model himself. Although Bhasani did not specifically mention the origin of his ideas, it is clear that they were rooted in Islam and the needs of Bengal.

Bhasani also referred to Abu Dhar as one who justly fought even against fellow oppressive Muslim rulers with Islamic principles. No work has been done on Bhasani's connection with Abu Dhar's ideas. An examination of Bhasani's speeches reveals that the legend of Abu Dhar, the Prophet's companion who fought for social justice, contributed

to inspire people like Bhasani. He seems both to exemplify and to have influenced Bhasani's religious outlook.

In this we see while Azad's concern was for Hindu-Muslim unity in India and his appeal to Muslims was to support the Congress, Bhasani's concern seemed to be to improve the fate of Bengali peasants. It would appear that Bhasani's understandings were mediated by historical and social circumstances.

Bhasani's speeches reveal his political vision. Citing *shahada* or witness of faith he wrote in 1974:

This religious idea will not establish like the socialists *lá iláha*, there is no god- but will establish *illá Alláh* rule there is God. This not only will establish *Huquq Allah* but also *Huquq Ibad*. This belief not only will improve material development but also spiritual development.<sup>179</sup> When I speak of the ideas of *rubúbiyah* not only do the Communists and leftists oppose it, it is also opposed by the rightist ulama and people with religious dogmatism. I want to say that in this worldly life after our basic needs of food and shelter are fulfilled; there is also the element of spiritual realization. This is evident in our life's triumph and tragedies, love, the mystery behind creation, the social and family ties. Communists don't accept this type of belief in the unseen and in non-materialist beliefs. That is why they couldn't fulfill the overall needs of human beings.<sup>180</sup>

Bhasani never said that he invented his model from any particular source. He did not mention any particular source of the origin of his ideas. We may assume that he selected some of his ideas from the vast storehouse of Islam. He used those exemplars, modes of reasoning, and ways of interpreting scripture, that seemed in his judgements appropriate.<sup>181</sup> He must have developed in his mind\* the basic *rubúbiyah* religious thoughts around the 1920's. He said that during that period he attended seminars and met

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<sup>179</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *Rabubiater Bumika* (The Role of *Rabubiyah*), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Sheila McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

\* Since Bhasani did not write his ideas in detail, as a Sufi his ideas were only demonstrated in his actions and anecdotal expressions to his followers.



many distinguished people to grasp this idea.<sup>182</sup> He said that he “took the path of *Rabubiat* (*rubúbiyah*) from 1921.”<sup>183</sup> That coincides with the year of Azad’s publication of the *Tarjuman al-Quran*.<sup>184</sup> Although there is no available material to support this claim, it seems to me that Bhasani’s spelling of the Arabic word *rubúbiyah*, used by Azad as *rabubiat* would suggest a connection. However, in the political sphere, Bhasani’s understanding of *rubúbiyah* is far different from Azad’s. As indicated above Azad used the term to defend Indian nationalism. Bhasani used it as a concept to define God’s providence as opposed to man-made inequality in society. It seems that *rubúbiyah* was a current concept in the time of Bhasani. Because of his personal experience he took this metaphysical term and gave it a social, even socialist dimension.<sup>185</sup>

The term *rubúbiyah* was used by innumerable Sufis and Muslim political leaders in Arab countries as well as in India. The Sufi understanding of the concepts “*Rabb*” and *rubúbiyah* and their ramifications must have been very high- flown, but it is brought right down to earth by the Muslim reformers, in the most familiar bit of scripture possible.

Like Azad, Subhání was also mentioned in Bengali sources that influenced Bhasani. ‘Allámah Azad Subhání’ was a leading Muslim League leader of the pre-partition days. While Bhasani acknowledged Azad’s influence, and even Gandhi’s, he never acknowledged Subhání as an influence. He mentioned that he had an encounter with Subhání’s in 1946 in Assam, who strongly recommended that he continue to practice

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<sup>182</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *Rabubiater Bumika* (The Role of *Rabubiyah*), *op. cit.* p. 1.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjuman Al- Quran*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>185</sup> Mohammed Korban Ali says, Bhasani had special respect for Mawlana Azad., see Korbal Ali, “Srititae Mawlana Bhasani”(Mawlana Bhasani in my Memories, in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu’m Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani*, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani. *op. cit.*, p.191.

the idea of *rubúbiyah*.<sup>186</sup> Subhání's is not a prominent figure as Azad or Ali brothers in Indian politics but references cite his association with the Ahmadia movement as well.<sup>187</sup> Bhasani was never involved with the *Ahamadia* Movement. There is no available material by Subhání in my possession to prove or disprove that Bhasani was influenced by him. While Bhasani said that he had been following this path from 1921, a year after he joined in the *Khilafat* movement, and from the existing information available, and the cross checking of references indicates it more likely that he was influenced by Azad than Subhání.<sup>188</sup>

Bhasani was not alone in the use of the Sufi concept *rubúbiyah*. *Rubúbiyah* was a concept used at the time to explain many things to many people. Mirza M. Kizir explained *rububiyah*, as a concept:

God sustains not only the people of this or that religion, people of this or that country, but all, irrespective of creed, race or color. He is the lord of all ages, and all places, the fountain head of all grace, the source of all power, physical and spiritual, the nourished of all that is created and the supporter of all that exists. The grace of God encompasses the whole world and encircles all people of all ages.<sup>189</sup>

Bhasani's understanding of the concept and its ramifications was formed by the historical and social circumstances of the Bengali context of his time, to which he adopted the ideas of *rubúbiyah*, giving the concept his own colouring. Bhasani gives the original scriptural term *Rabb* and its derivative metaphysical term *rubúbiyah* a modern

<sup>186</sup> Maksud, *Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>187</sup> The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement: presenting Islam as peaceful, tolerant, rational, inspiring <[www.muslim.org.access](http://www.muslim.org.access)> Feb. 20, 2003.

<sup>188</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *Rabubiater Bumika* (The Role of *Rububiyah*), op. cit., p. 2. Also in Mawlana Bhasani, "Silver Line", in Mawlana Bhasani (ed.) *World Peace*, op. cit., p. 2. In the journal *World Peace* edited by Bhasani there are articles by Abul Hashem and Shamsul Haq that also talks about the concept of *rububiyah*. These are the two associates of Bhasani during the Pakistan period.

Islamic treatment in the context of Bengal. Unlike his contemporaries, Bhasani did not expand on his concept in any one major work; he wrote the aforementioned pamphlet and also raised it in his speeches during different periods of his career. We can assume that there is some real, invariable content of *Rabb* or *rubúbiyah* - some external truth of the Quran – which was used by several Muslim figures in their exposition of the societies where they lived. In these contexts, the concepts always had a speculative meaning. They were not used in a political way. It is a startling concept when Bhasani used it in relation to societal problems.

Based on the existing materials, we can say that Bhasani's view of *rubúbiyah* was a synthesis of what he had learned from his encounters with his Sufi *pir* Bagdadi, Azad, various scholars or his contemporaries in his life.

#### *Rubúbiyah* and Sufi pacifism vs activism

*Rubúbiyah* is a concept used by Sufis throughout the Muslim world to mean the unity of being. However, Bhasani's use of the word and its relationship to *jihad* illustrates the Sufi colouring of his Islamic model of activism in political affairs, which represents a departure from many of his contemporaries. As mentioned earlier, Bhasani often cited the example of the Prophet, the four caliphs, and some times Abu Dhar Gaffari, to justify this tradition of Sufi activism. J. Cameron comments that Abu Dhar during Mu`áwiyah's time stood for Abú Bakr's distribution of state revenues in equal shares to all Muslims. He reproached his opponents that they did not act as justly as Abu Bakr and Umar.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Mirza M. Khizer, "Sufism and Social Integration" in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.) Sufism and Communal Harmony, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>190</sup> J. Cameron, Abu Dhar Gafari: An Examination of his Image in the Hagiography of Islam, op. cit., p.13.

Indeed, *rubūbiyah* was developed by Sufi activists. Sayyid Waheed Akhtar says that Sufism originated in the practices of early Muslims who were disillusioned with corruption among the Muslims after the death of the fourth Caliph.<sup>191</sup> Sufism had not yet crystallized as a religious movement during Abu Dhar's time.<sup>192</sup> But Abu Dhar was a pious Muslim and was of a considerable importance for the dogmatics of "the faction of Ali."<sup>193</sup> Abu Dhar was called the "saint militant" for the righteous cause. He was one of the prominent figures in the party of the pious during the first violent changes in Islam. Abu Dhar interpreted the Koran, 1X, 34: "But those who treasure up gold and silver and expand not in the way of God announce tidings of a grievous torment." While Mu'awiyah said: "this verse doth not concern us, but Jews and Christians." Abu Dhar declared that it concerned both "us" and "them." Early records show Abu Dhar inciting the poor against the rich in Damascus against the financial policy of Mu'a'wiyah.<sup>194</sup> Abu

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<sup>191</sup> Sayyid Waheed Akhtar, "Tasawwuf: the meeting ground of Tashayyu and Tasannun" in Ashghar Ali Engineer (ed), *Sufism and Communal Harmony*, op. cit. p. 92.

<sup>192</sup> An interesting book on Abu Dhar is written by J. Cameron's book *Abu Dharr al-GHIFARI, An Examination of his Image in the Hagiography of Islam* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1982). Abu Dhar is often credited with having taken the general concept of justice in Islam to the political plane. In his book, Cameron looks at the image of Abu Dhar who lived during the early period of Islam. While he did not belong to the great men that surrounded the Prophet, he represents a peculiar type, that of the non-conformist. Cameron digs through the *hadiths* (Prophet's sayings) and their interpretations to show how Abu Dhar was later considered "both a prototype and a model of piety." After the death of the four caliphs two separate traditions started to develop, the orthodox and the mystical – including heterodoxy. Orthodoxy can be traced back to Mu'awiyah while his contemporary, Abu Dhar, represents the latter tradition of heterodoxy. *Shia* Islam adopted a variation of the latter. But also within the *Sunni* tradition, especially among Sufis like Bhasani, the figure of Abu Dhar provided a revolutionary model to rationalize socio-economic changes. In Islamic history the story of Abu Dhar continued to survive as a symbol of a pious activist who fought for the redistribution of wealth. At the core of this, there is a strong component of emotional faith. Though Cameron finds many of these stories fictitious, the legend accumulated such romantic weight that it had great effect in the later period of history as could be seen with Bhasani's identification with Abu Dhar. Bhasani often referred to Abu Dhar as one who justly fought even against fellow oppressive Muslim rulers with Islamic principles.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

Dhar's interpretation is based on God as the *Rabb* of all beings. Cameron examines the stories and finds that the germs of discontent remained and the quarrel between Mu'a'wiyah and Abu Dhar was a prototype of Muslim protest against other Muslim ruler's unjust rule. Abu Dhar shows "the case of his self denial and sharp tongue." To Bhasani, Abu Dhar serves as an example of a righteous leader.<sup>195</sup>

We will see that Abu Dhar was not Bhasani's only political ideal. There were other Muslim leaders, especially Omar, whom he admired for "being just to his subjects." For Bhasani selected from the storehouse of Islam, whatever exemplars, modes of reasoning and ways of interpreting scripture, and so forth that seemed in his judgement most appropriate.<sup>196</sup>

Most Sufis followed the ideals of Islamic justice and simple living, and they concentrated on worship and spiritual growth. This tendency began during the regime of the Third Caliph and was strengthened after the tragedies of Karbala, and the massacre in the city of Holy Ka'bah. Hasan al-Basri belongs to the first generation of *Zuhad* or *Ubad* (devotees) and *mutakallimun*.<sup>197</sup>

The belief in Islamic justice and simple living of the early Muslim mystics turned into an apolitical movement. Sayyid Wahid Akhtar says that Imam al-Hasan's surrender of the Caliphate marked the beginning of total domination of the Umayyads' unjust rule which was contrary to the Islamic ideal of a just socio-political order. After the tragedy of

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<sup>195</sup> From available documents it seems that Bhasani liked Abu Dhar's style of protest and appreciated his fight against Muslim tyrants so much so that he even named a college in Dhaka, Bangladesh after Abu Dhar as Abu Dhar College. See Dewan Azraf's "Bhasani Ak Annonya Baiktitya," (Bhasani a unique Personality) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani*, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>196</sup> Sheila McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and modernity*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>197</sup> Sayyid Wahid Akhtar, "Tasawwuf: the meeting ground of Tashayyu and Tasannun" in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.) *Sufism and Communal Harmony*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Karbala the Immams of *Ahl al-Bayt* (Prophet's house) as a principle withdrew from politics and devoted themselves to worship and developing religious sciences, with a view to save Islam and its spirit. Ali Ibn Hussain's grandson who "devoted himself in training scholars refused to be drawn into politics after the fall of the Ummaids when the caliphate was offered to him by Abu Muslim Khurasani. Thus, he maintained the tradition of his grandfather and shunned the worldly power."<sup>198</sup>

Bhasani as a Sufi *pir*, like Abu Dhar, did not see Mu'a'wiyah and the ruling kings as ideal rulers. To him the ideal persons were among those who raised dissent against such rulers. Bhasani saw Abu Dhar's revolutionary Islam, opposed to the status quo Islam as a fight for justice. Like Abu Dhar, as will be seen in part 2 of the thesis, he felt that the early Caliphs were just to distribute the wealth and to bring justice to their people. He saw Abu Dhar as a model leader who protested against the lack of such an order. Bhasani believed that the early Islam's basic thrust was towards universal brotherhood, equality and justice. In this respect, Bhasani was similar to Abu Dhar, but it is certain that the term *rubúbiyah* was not coined as early as during Abu Dhar's time.

#### *Rubúbiyah* and Bhasani's *Jihad* (class struggle) as a Sufi ideal

*Jihad* generally means to strive, to exert oneself to struggle. In a religious context it may express a struggle against one's own evil inclinations or an exertion for the sake of Islam and the *ummah*. In the books on Islamic law, the word refers to armed struggle against the unbelievers, which is also a common meaning in the Quran.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p.93.

<sup>199</sup> Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in the Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publisher, 1996).

Bhasani's *jihad* is between the exploiter and the exploited; not against non Muslims but against any exploiter. To him God does not discriminate. Bhasani says "There is no religion of the exploiter except exploitation. It is between the *zâlim* and the *mazlûm*; exploiter vs the exploited; destitute against the rich."<sup>200</sup> Bhasani's task as a religious man was to engage in this struggle, which to him was the order of God. This entailed some extra-Quranic assumptions or principles.

Bhasani spoke constantly of the oppressed and oppressors (*mazlûm*, *zâlim*, *jihad*). These are Quranic terms with much resonance for the masses, with a class appeal. It seems that Bhasani's *jihad* is class struggle phrased in Islamic terms. However, this way it does not seem his views were socialist. Sufis live close to the people. As a Sufi he would look at the practical consequences of ideas than simply following the socialist ideology of class struggle. In this approach he differed from Maududi who used the term *jihad* to mean a fight against the non Muslims. Bhasani said "To me the change in the fate of the peasants is to have development in the country. They are the backbone of the country. For this reason I struggle for their rights." In Bengal as an agrarian society with majority of peasants he fought to bring real change in the life of the majority of the population.<sup>201</sup> Bhasani used a related but similar term to *jihad* namely "*haqâqiyat*" ("righteousness" or "just or righteous rule"), to justify his fight to establish human rights. "Mine is a revolutionary religion. I am a religious man and my duty is to protest against

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 538.

<sup>201</sup> Azad Sultan. "Jibito Bhasanir Chaie Mrito Bhasani Onak Shaktishali (The Dead Bhasani is more Powerful than the Living)" in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani*, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 544.

all kinds of injustice and falsehood,” Bhasani said.<sup>202</sup> It is true that the *Quran* declares that Muslims should strive (*jihad*) to realize the Lord’s will in history.

The above ways of looking at things by Bhasani makes him different from other religious leaders. The goal of Bhasani’s *jihad* was to establish a just society for everyone, irrespective of religion. Maududi’s was to establish a theocratic Islamic state. Moniruzzaman says:

Maududi’s Islamic revolution does not aim at the reformation of Islam but at a “renaissance”-to return to the pristine purity of Islam in its golden age under the religio-political leadership of the Prophet and first caliphs. His formulation of Islamic ideology follows a literal interpretation of the Koran and Sunnah (tradition of the prophet). Jama’at’s purpose, thus, was to expose the hollowness of the Islamic modernists’s reform and to fight a long-drawn battle against secularism whether in liberal democratic form or in modern Communist cloak.<sup>203</sup>

It can be argued that Maududi as well as Mawlana Ilyas sacrificed social justice for ritualism. In contrast, Bhasani follows his Sufi understanding of *rubúbiyah*, through which *jihad* is seen as the struggle against any oppressor. It would be an interesting idea but beyond the scope of the thesis to have a comparative understanding of the ideas of Mawlana Ilyas and Bhasani both of whom went to Deoband and how they addressed ethical problems of modern Islam. Bhasani was also a contemporary of Maududi. Generally speaking, they have a great number of similarities and contrasting views.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 540-543.

<sup>203</sup> Talukdar Moniruzzaman. “Bangladesh: History and Culture” in S. R. Chakravarty and Virendra Narain (eds.) *Bangladesh, History and Culture*, vol-1 (New Delhi: South Asian Publications, 19), p. 66.

<sup>204</sup> The following shows some similarities and differences in ideas among the three religious leaders:

<b>Ilyas (1885-1944)</b>	<b>Maududi (1903-1979)</b>	<b>Bhasani (1885-1976)</b>
Faith Movement	Muslim Umma (Islamic state Movement)	Justice movement (Islamic life)
<i>Jihad</i> for reconversion of Muslims to the true faith	<i>Jihad</i> to establish Sharia rule	<i>Jihad</i> to establish a just society



For Bhasani, the struggle against “*za’lim* whether a Muslim or a non-Muslim, will continue.”<sup>205</sup> It is interesting that Maududi shared with Bhasani the conviction that Islam was engaged in a confrontation with Western imperialism. Whereas for Maududi, the ultimate purpose of Western modernization was to “Complete the material colonization of the Muslim World by means of material and cultural colonization.” For Bhasani, it was a fight by the *Mazlu’m* against imperialism for human freedom from the bondage of the imperialists and the colonial rulers. To him Imperialist powers were aligned with local landlords and populist leaders who oppressed the masses. His *jihad* was thus to remove obstacles from the road to happiness for his people. Fazlee Khoda says:

It is quite original with Bhasani that, while others called for *jihad* against non-Muslims and Communists, he called *jihad* against oppressive Muslim rulers, often with

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Mosque centred movement	Islamic political party	Secular political party
Theistic subjectivism (only God knows)	Theistic subjectivism (God knows but the will to uphold)	Rationalism (God knows but sought evidence for conclusion)
Islamic dress code	Islamic dress code essential for women	Dress is a cultural necessity.
Anti imperialism (to preserve Islam)	Anti-Imperialism (to preserve Islam)	Anti-Imperialism (Western imperialism)

Ilyas’s was for the revival of faith, Maududi’s was to establish Islamic State or umma and Bhasani’s was for the socio-economic welfare of citizens he called “Islamic life.” Contrary to Maududi’s vision of a theocratic state Bhasani’s vision of establishing a democratic society as will be seen in the chapter 4, 5 and 6, from this perspective responding to the modern needs makes him more of a modern leader.

<sup>205</sup> Mohammed Waliullah, “Bangla Assam Jonaneta (The mass leader of Bengal and Assam)” in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu’m Jonaneta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani) op. cit.*, p. 361.

the help of Communists, and nationalists. He said "this *jihad* is the *jihad* of life and death."<sup>206</sup>

Bhasani says: "To survive we need food to be distributed. Providing the necessity of food is Islamic." Thus the major difference between Bhasani and other Muslim leaders in this respect is that he fought against Muslim oppressors.<sup>207</sup>

Bhasani continued to use the terms *rubúbiyah*, *za'lim* and *zulm* and *haq* in his common vocabulary to identify the type of struggle he was involved in. There doesn't seem to have been any great changes over time in his basic understanding of his ideas, as will be seen in Part 11.

#### Rubúbiyah and Nationalism

Bhasani's understanding of the idea of *rubúbiyah* also led him to fight for people's cultural rights and the right to self determination. He did not see any contradiction in this. To Bhasani, this is allowed in the Quran. Indeed, the Quran said about Mankind:

O Men, we have created all of you, male and female, and then made your tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most careful of his duties.<sup>208</sup>

Bhasani was not the first to understand this. To Amir Khasru, an eminent Indian Islamist thinker of Chistia tradition, the love of one's country is seen as an integral part of

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<sup>206</sup> Fazlee Khuda, "Puroshuttom, Mawlana Bhasani, (Bhasani the Near-perfectman)" in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 149-150.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>208</sup> Iqbal Ali Shah, *Islamic Sufism*, Idarah-I-Adabiyat-I-Delhi, 1979, p. 38. Also in Mirza M. Khizer, "Sufism and Social Integration" in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.) Sufism and Communal Harmony, *op. cit.*

the Prophet's religion.<sup>209</sup> Indeed, this also refers to the Prophet's tradition that love of one's country is integral part of the faith. Unlike the the main stream *ulama*, Sufis generally respect the religion and culture of other people. Bhasani thought that Pakistani nationalism based on religion denying the rights of other religious groups was not appropriate.

Sufi humanists like to cite verses in the Quran that say God sent his messengers to every nation and in every community and each Muslim must believe it. The Quran says "there was no nation but had its guide (the Prophet)" and "a Divine messenger was sent to every class of men."<sup>210</sup>

In the Quran there is other evidence to support this claim. Sura 5: 48 of the Quran which Bhasani often quoted: "For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced –out way. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as you are)."<sup>211</sup> From which Bhasani must have concluded that Bengalis and all other Muslim people have the right to use their own language and culture and still be Muslims. This seems to be the basis of his fight for cultural rights of people.

#### Islamic State vs Islamic Life

Esposito says, the Muslim's obligation is to realize that God's will in history is communal as well as individual. (S.3:104, 110). There is the Islamic community (*umma*) for religious solidarity and, as God is one (*tawhid*), so all of his creation has an underlying unity and is subject to His rule.<sup>212</sup> However, based on the the principle of *rubūbiyah* or the unity of being, Bhasani wished to establish not an Islamic state, but an

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<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81- 82.

<sup>210</sup> The Quran: verse no. 24 and Sura XXXV.

<sup>211</sup> The Quran: verse no. 48, Sura V.

Islamic life of happiness for all. To Bhasani, the *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* state is not an Islamic theocratic state with rigid Islamic law (*Sharia*), but rather a state where people would not starve. In a speech in 1956, during the early years of Pakistan, Bhasani said about Pakistan's populist leaders:

We are Muslims, we need an Islamic state" is a populist slogan but there is corruption, nepotism, oppression, prostitution, drinking, gambling. Islamic life is not about corruption, nepotism, oppression, prostitution, drinking, gambling. Pakistan is not only Muslims.<sup>213</sup>

During the early period of Pakistan Bhasani formed a non political organization called Islam Mission and declared that:

Wherever the government will work for the benefit of people, our mission will be to serve for the sake of human benefit. But if there are any anti- people activities the Islam Mission will work hard to fight against them.

That is why it is my mission to preach the ideals of Islam, and the Quran to the whole world. ...This responsibility is taken by the Islam Mission. With all kinds of help from sympathetic people and leaders, I will lead this mission for Islam. In Islam 14 hundred years ago, the ideals of equality, friendship and peace were advanced. ...That is why I have chosen the path of propagating Islam.<sup>214</sup>

Bhasani's Islam Mission was not a missionary group to convert the non Muslims but its main objective was to fight for justice and bring equality among people. What type of Islam was Bhasani asking for? He was more specific about it. He called this Islamic life based on *rubúbiyah*.

In his mission Bhasani emphasized the purity of character of the rulers, for that way the whole population could change. Only people with purity of heart can establish God's kingdom. He seems to be less interested in the preservation of the Muslim *umma*/

<sup>212</sup> John L. Esposito, *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 4.

<sup>213</sup> Maksud, *Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

or the integrity of the Muslim state than in the welfare of the subjects. He calls the welfare of the subjects as providing “Islamic life.”

In his understanding of *rubúbiyah* Bhasani following the Sufi tradition, interestingly he did not use the term *umma* at all like the traditional *ulama*.<sup>215</sup> Clearly, his aim was to see an “Islamic life”, not an Islamic state.<sup>216</sup> In this approach he seems to have the heart of faith in people.

Bhasani practiced *Sharia*, as a personal responsibility to God. He did not see it as the responsibility of the state to implement such laws. He also opposed the traditional education in the Madrassa. He said “Today what we know as Madrassa education is not a truly Islamic education.”<sup>217</sup> Bhasani rejected the traditional education and gave the understanding of *jihad* and *sharia* his own special colouring. He injected a social meaning which perhaps arose from his consideration of an unjust Islamic state’s forceful use of *sharia* by populist leaders against the poor and the underdog. In all this it seems Bhasani adopted *jihad* as a tool to fight for human rights against its violators.

As a *pir* Bhasani’s emphasis on *sharia* must have been influenced by his Deoband training to remain an observant Muslim himself who practiced *sharia* in his personal life. In 1972 he sent a directive to his followers emphasizing that they must practice *sharia*. He led prayers like an *Immam* and he was an *alim*. However, he said: “When doing your duty to God you also do your duty to your fellow human being (irrespective of religion, caste and color). Mohammed Hossain says, as a Sufi politician Bhasani used to say:

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 676-77.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 520.

“There is no distinction between men. In the eyes of God, all human beings are the same.” Hossain says, “I have seen the *Mawlana* follow this saying of the Prophet. He always followed this fully in his life.”<sup>218</sup>

Like the Prophet he also performed the *salat* five times a day and advised others to do the same. He used to fast in the month of *Ramadhan*. He would do his Friday prayer. But due to his Bengali Sufi upbringing, he never forced people to practice Islam. He never faltered to pray to God (*Hukkul Allah* as a duty) nor in his duty to his people (*Haquq Ibád*).

In addition, Bhasani advised his followers, “You should do both the prayer also lead family life.”<sup>219</sup> Unlike other Sufis he did not believe in extreme ascetic life. Unlike the traditional *ulama*, Bhasani respected other ideologies as well. He felt that Communism also supported the cause of the downtrodden but that it lacked faith in God.<sup>220</sup> To him the *Khilafat* was a perfect example of Godly rulers in favour of the downtrodden. Based on this interpretation, his Pan Islamism was not a mere political union of Muslims, but an example of a perfect state of *rububiyht* [sic] rule like that of the early *Khilafat*.<sup>221</sup>

#### Rubúbiyah and Sufi Tariqah

Bhasani being a Qádriyah pir also used to celebrate the anniversary of the death Khaja Moinuddin Chisti, a Sufi pir who worked with the poor from every religious group.

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<sup>218</sup> Mohammed Hossain, “Mawlana Bhasanir Songshar” (Mawlana Bhasanir Family Life) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani)*, op.cit., p. 284.

<sup>219</sup> Bhasani, “Murid Der Proti Ahobbhan” (“Directives to my followers”) (Bengali) in a pamphlet, 1972.

<sup>220</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *World Peace*, 1.

*Tariqah*, or ways of the Sufis, are not water tight compartments. On that date people from different religious groups attended such commemorations. As mentioned earlier the Qádiriyyah and the Chishtiyya traditions of Sufism both emphasize helping the needy and Bhasani followed both traditions although the Qádiriyyah tradition predominated.<sup>222</sup> Fazlur Rahman says:

The Qádiriyyah is among the most peaceful of the Sufi orders and is distinguished by piety and humanitarianism, the ethos inculcated by the Shaykh with whom it is associated. It is on the whole orthodox avoiding the excesses of the more extreme popular orders. It is doubtful whether the originator left any rigid system of either doctrine or practice besides the basic spirit of charity and non-fanaticism.<sup>223</sup>

Bhasani's idea of *huqúq al 'ibád*, duty to man, [the] social part of the teaching is derived from his Sufi heritage. Thus, Bhasani said "...the holy Quran makes performance void and invalid when duty to man is ignored or is not duly performed."<sup>224</sup> Mohammed Yahya Tamizi tells us more about the Qádiriyya order:

The original founder of this order is Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani who resided in Bagdad and died in 1166 A.D. The Qádiriyyah order practice self denial and austere rites. The famous Indian follower of this order was Mir Mohammed, commonly known as Mian Mir; He was the teacher of Prince Dara Shikuh, the son of Moghul emperor Shah Jahan [he was in favor of Hindu-Muslim unity]. This group of Sufis works among poor and down-trodden. They believe in the lordship of God and the unity of being.<sup>225</sup>

Sufis congregate in groups on the death anniversary of their pir. Bhasani organized political meetings and conference style gatherings as if they were *oras*. He

<sup>221</sup> Maksud, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op.cit., p. 346.

<sup>222</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 577. (Emphasis added).

<sup>223</sup> Fazlur Rahman, Islam, op. cit., pp. 159-160.

<sup>224</sup> Mohammed Hossain Khan, "Mawlana Bhasanike Jamon Dakechee" (The Way I saw Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani. op. cit., records his speech given in 1970 in the Coastal region of Bangladesh. (Emphasis added), p. 239.

<sup>225</sup> Mian Mir was the one who laid the foundation of the Sikh Golden temple in Amritshar. See for details Mohammed Yahya Tamizi, Sufi Movements in Eastern India, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

introduced politics into this innovative Bengali pir practice. He did *dhikir* (meditation) in his Darbar hall with his followers.<sup>226</sup> He instructed them:

You should attend seminar and conferences. Never fear anybody except God. Protest against any injustice or oppression.

You should not bribe or accept bribe or to forcefully deny other's right to property for your own benefit.

Help people, to avoid the influence of the false *pirs* who might lead you to astray.

In your leisure time organize discussion circles and discuss God's grace, glory and treasures. With this also discuss social and economic conditions and determine your duty to it.<sup>227</sup>

The model of fighting for justice through honesty rather than normative Islam was Bhasani's priority. Bhasani's training with his pir of the Qádriya order must have helped him to become knowledgeable in Qádriya Sufi mysticism and the service of humanity. Bhasani's sayings are loaded with Qádriya morals to serve the poor and respect other religions. He said: political "workers have to be gentle, hardworking, patient, morally upright, fearless and intelligent and have to be ready to face any adverse situation." This is a different type of moral reasoning than that of the traditional ulama. Here Bhasani emphasizes honesty, gentleness and patience many of these are Sufi virtues. A glimpse of the daily life of Bhasani from one of his disciples will give us a better understanding of him in his role as a pir and the politician. Moiz Ali Fakir says:

I first met Hujur Bhasani in 1945 in Assam. I am originally from Boropota subdivivision of Kamrup of Assam. Now I live permantly in Santosh.

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<sup>226</sup> Azad Sultan, "Jibito Bhasanir Chaita Mreto Bhasani Onak Shoktishali" ("The Dead Bhasani is more powerful than the living Bhasani") in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 538.

<sup>227</sup> Maksud, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 574.



Bhasani Hujur did meditation every night in the Darbar hall next to his house. He instructed us about how to do *dhikr* "how to stop breathing and say *La ilaha Allahu*." He used to pray five times a day. He did meditation deep at night.

His daily routine was; in the morning he did his prayer, then he did his breakfast brought by people. Then next read the daily newspaper, followed by meeting people that came to see him. People often brought money and commodities as gifts.

He never counted money himself given to him by his murids. His lunch was small fish and sometimes meat always provided by his well-wishers. There was no timetable for food and sleep. He was always with people. When he heard of a national or international problem or a tragedy he would feel sad at that. He did not only lecture like an ordinary Mawlana. He practiced what he preached.<sup>228</sup>

To Bhasani, politics is about practical knowledge. Bhasani gave more importance to practical knowledge than theoretical or textual knowledge. Bhasani often said: "The taste of new things are different whether politics, love, singing, doing business ... whatever you do, do something new, do something in a new style, try to invent something."<sup>229</sup> His source of knowledge was not any particular book, but his identification with the people. He seems to have been influenced by Ghazzálí. Bhasani often mentioned Imám Ghazzálí who said to his followers: "if by calling to prayer people don't respond, then use a drum." Relating Ghazzálí's metaphor Bhasani seem to have said to his followers, to "be practical."<sup>230</sup>

It is important to understand that Bhasani used these ideas in speeches, as anecdotes in quiet movements to his Sufi followers. Ghazzálí said, evil has to be combated in the self and in society. In the self, its worst forms are self-centredness, anger, lust, and greed. In society evil is in the structures of injustice and inhumanity.

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<sup>228</sup> I have interviewed Moiz Ali Fakir in Santosh, Tangail in 1995.

<sup>229</sup> Mohammed Hossain, Mawlana Bhasanike Jamon Dekeachi (The Way I Saw Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) op. cit. p. 244.

<sup>230</sup> Nurul Alam Rausi, "Hukumatei Rabbanir Protheshata Mawlana Bhasani" (Mawlana Bhasani, the Founder of Hukumati Rabbani) in Quayyum (ed.) op. cit., p. 662.

Bhasani did not synthesize and voice these ideas as his doctrine. He rather tried to practice them as principles. Sheila McDonough says:

The sufi contribution to ethics stressed the necessity of inner integrity. Since sufism is concerned with the disciplines of personal purification, training the will and the attitudes, the emphasis is more on inner states than on conforming to external norms or patterns of behavior. Sufis tended to practice rather than abstract theory.<sup>231</sup>

From the sufi point of view, self-knowledge and self-purification are necessary preconditions to a more perfect knowledge of God. The self has to be cleansed of false pride, anger, and greed. The sufi virtues are patience and sobriety.<sup>232</sup>

Bhasani kept his principles and expressed his inner values expressed only as his external codes in his political actions. As noted earlier, Bhasani didn't expand his ideas in one place. He revealed them through actions, in speeches throughout his life in Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

#### *Rubúbiyah of the haqqání pir*

Bhasani was known as the *haqqání pir* which literally means that he was a *pir* who was fighting for establishing the truth about human rights. In explaining *rubúbiyah* and its ramifications, Bhasani takes this metaphysical term and interprets other related concepts such as, *za'lim*, *zulm*, *jihad*, *Hukkul Allah*, *Huqquq al 'ibád* and giving them a modern Islamic scriptural treatment. They all boil down to his fight for economic, social and cultural rights. He always had the courage to say things that people did not want to hear. He was not afraid to use spiritual authority to protest against poverty, and the loss of human dignity. He considered this to be his responsibility and legitimized it by means of a set of beliefs identified above that defined the existing system as unjust and immoral.

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<sup>231</sup> Sheila McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity*, op. cit. p. 19.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Bhasani had some absolute values, plus he understood his role in concrete terms in the present. As we have seen his ideas had a political character, and in this sense he had a vision; we prefer to call them his religious and philosophical ideas.

We have seen that the shaping of Bhasani's ideas and commitment was strongly influenced by the socio-political environment in which he was born and raised and has a Bengali rural "dynamic." He did not personally acknowledge anybody's name for borrowing any term or idea from his associates. Perhaps he thought they were after all Islamic to fight for the "downtrodden" and he was not following any *bida* or invented idea. Indeed, the "intolerable" and "oppressive" nature of the society he lived in were strong forces which made him feel that he could do something to serve "justice" in society.

## PART 2

### BHASANI'S VISION AND LEADERSHIP

#### IN ASSAM, PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH (1929-1976)

As a prelude to our discussion it should be reiterated that the conditions and contexts under which Bhasani lived will be discussed in chapter 4, 5 and 6, for the reason that the central concern of this thesis is to discover how Bhasani as a leader used his religious and philosophical ideas such as *rububiyah*, anti-communalism, political activism in his *jihad* etc. in the Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh periods to shape the politics of the region.

Bhasani was involved in the politics of Assam from 1929-1947 when the British ruled India. He was involved from 1947 to 1970 in Pakistan which had emerged from the partition of British India and from 1971-76 in Bangladesh which had emerged in turn from the breakup of Pakistan. In chapters 4, 5 and 6, Bhasani's vision and leadership during the three periods will be considered. It is important to know that although Bhasani followed a *rubúbiyah* philosophy, he never founded a political party with a stated *rubúbiyah* policy. As a result, we will only expect to see Bhasani as a Sufi implicitly using his *rubúbiyah* ideas in his political career.

Thus, in trying to understand Bhasani's "ideas in action," the following elements will be carefully considered; his speeches demonstrating his preferences, options, his particular actions, the contents he used in pamphlets, his perspectives on *rubúbiyah*, the nature and type of religious rituals and practices he observed.

#### CHAPTER 4: BHASANI'S VISION AND LEADERSHIP IN ASSAM (1929-1947)

The region of Assam is “bounded on all sides by hilly offshoots of the Himalayan ranges.” The mighty Bramaputra River that originates in the Himalayas flows through Bengal to meet the Bay of Bengal. It is a mountainous and sparsely inhabited place. Kamaluddin described the region thus: “Despite its proximity with Bengal, due to its mountainous terrain, and abundance of wild animals, as well as life threatening tropical diseases in the region, it did not become a densely populated area.”<sup>233</sup> Only “destitute Bengalis” escaping poverty or the oppression of the *zamindars* settled in Assam making a living by cutting bushes and trees. Because of its physical proximity with Bengal, Bengalis did not consider Assam as a separate region.

In 1827 Assam became part of the British Empire and under British rule of India; Assam was then considered part of Bengal.<sup>234</sup> The India Act of 1889 allowed people from any part of India to settle in any province of India. However, in 1920 a boundry was drawn by the Assam government to prevent Bengali peasants from settling in Assam, called the Line system. Bhasani protested against the Line system and helped peasants during the 30's and the 40's to develop settlements in this sparsely populated area.

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<sup>233</sup> Kamaluddin Ahmad, “Sansodio Rajnititae Mawlana Bhasani” (Mawlana Bhasani in the Constitutional Politics) (Bengali) in Dainik Bangla, 17th November, 1993. Also in Maksud's Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>234</sup> Maksud, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

**Table 3: Showing the chronology of important events during the Assam period**

1827	Assam became part of the British Empire and under British rule of India
1889	The India Act of 1889 allowed people from any part of India to settle in any province of India.
1911	Assam and East Bengal were made into a province.
1920	The line system was introduced in Assam by the Congress Government of Assam to discourage Bengali settlement.
1926	The <i>zamindar</i> persuaded the British to officially expel Bhasani from Bengal.
1929	Bhasani started to help peasants from Bengal settle in Gagmari. Gagmeri was renamed as Hamidabad. (With Bhasani's name Abdul Hamid).
1932	The historic annual session of the Congress Party at the Bari River was held. Ali brothers had serious differences with the Hindu leaders of the Congress Party. Like some other Muslim leaders Bhasani formally joined with the Muslim League.
1935	Bhasani fought against Bengali <i>Khadao Andalon</i> (Bengali push back) and was put in jail.
1937-47	From 1937-47 the elected government changed many times between the Congress and the Muslim League.
1937	Bhasani worked against the "line System." He was elected as the provincial caretaker member of Assam. In 1937 Muslim League formed a coalition government with Sadullahas the Premier of Assam.
1942	Sadullah government was reinstalled and the government under Bhasani's pressure loosened the line system.
1939	Bhasani performed his second time <i>haj</i> . He argued with King Saud of Saudi Arabia in favour of <i>Hajis</i> (pilgrims) performing <i>haj</i> without a visa. Visa system was newly introduced.
1940	Bhasani was active as the president in charge of the Assam Provincial Muslim League. He was present in Lahore, at the Muslim League's historic Lahore Resolution meeting.
April 8, 1944	At the Baropata conference he was elected (uncontested) as the President of the Assam Muslim League. Sadullah government was defeated and Bordolui Congress Party government was formed.
1944-1946	Ahomi National Mohashoba became intensively active in the Bengali eviction movement.
1945-46	Bhasani worked against Assam's Bengali <i>Khadao Andalon</i> (Bengali push back) from Assam movement.
1946	<i>Ammoran Anasen Dharmaghat</i> (fasting until death) against Assam's 'Bengali push back' policy in Borpata. At the request of Calcutta Muslim women he broke his fast.
1946, 1946	Bhasani met with Jinnah in Sylhet.
1946	The Delhi Conference.
1947	At the All India Muslim League session Bhasani claimed that approximately 18,000 homes had been destroyed by the government.
March 10, 1947	Bhasani was arrested on charges of endangering state security.
August 14, 1947	India and Pakistan's independence. Bhasani was in jail in Assam. He was released in November and forced to return to East Pakistan.

Source: Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, (Bengali) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994). Also Hasan Abdul Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), (in Bengali) (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1988).

Before Bhasani arrived to help people settle in Assam, there were in fact already

Bengali settlements. Bhasani describes one such settlement:

Do you know that I went long after many Bengali peasants already migrated there even then I saw tigers lie down by the side of the street? One is required to walk on the street even during the day with fire arms. People wouldn't go outside the house if it was not badly needed. When they had to, they normally carried with them either fire, search light or fire arms. People also used to die daily from snake bites. The mosquitoes were so big that you could tie them with string. ... These settlements were very isolated. This is the type of country where I came to settle. I have built a thatched quarter. I spent "one rupee and 14 ana" for it.<sup>235</sup>

In 1929 Bhasani started to help peasants from Bengal settle in Gagmari. His leadership was recognized in the naming of Gagmari "Hamidabad," after his name, Abdul Hamid. In the same year he organized a historic peasant conference in Bhasan *char* of Hamidabad, a fertile island which was often subject to inundation.<sup>236</sup> Muzahid says that he organized the conference against the locals who were xenophobic about Bengalis. It should be noted here that the huge island called Bashan in the Bramaputra River in Assam used to regularly be submerged under water as a result of flood; therefore peasants could not cultivate the land. There is a legend which says that, once Bshasani prayed to God that it would not be inundated and after that it never covered with water again. It miraculously remained like a floating vessel. From this legendary story his epithet, Bhasani was coined.<sup>237</sup> While the legend obviously cannot be confirmed, there is no doubt that the name Bhasani came from his efforts in settling peasants on Bhasan Island.

In 1926, while Bhasani was still a Congress leader, the *zamindar* of Tangail successfully persuaded the British to officially expel Bhasani from Bengal with his

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<sup>235</sup> Saiful Islam, *Shadhinata, Bhasani, Bharat* (Independence, Bhasani, India), *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>236</sup> Maksud, *Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>237</sup> Feroz Al-Muzahid. *Mawlana Bhasani's Jibon O Darshan* (Maulana Bhasani's Life and Philosophy) (Bengali) (Dhaka: Abdul Mannan, 1982), p. 26.

family.<sup>238</sup> He then decided to settle in Assam. It should be noted that during the 1920's following the end of the *Khilafat* movement, many Muslim progressive leaders left the Congress Party and joined the Muslim League. In 1930 during the historic Congress Party annual session at the Bari River, the Ali brothers also had serious differences with the extremist Hindu leaders of the Congress. Most *zamindars* in Bengal and Assam supported the Congress Party leaders. Bhasani represented the peasants who opposed their land owners. This alienated him further from the Congress Party.

During the late 20's as a consequence of Gandhi's calling off the noncooperation movement and *Khilafat* movement most Muslim leaders were confused about the future course of their actions. In 1930, Iqbal was elected to preside over the annual session of the Muslim League in Allahabad. On this occasion, he delivered the speech that later opinion has considered a seminal event in the eventual crystallization of Muslim hopes for greater cultural autonomy.<sup>239</sup> Iqbal made another speech in 1932 to the Annual Session of the All India Muslim Conference. He was still thinking about a federated India in which the member states would have autonomy over their cultural development. Iqbal wanted democracy and provincial autonomy with respect to culture, much like the model of Canada. For Iqbal, both Nehru and Gandhi were ignoring and refusing to deal with Indian cultural pluralism realistically.<sup>240</sup> Bhasani was perhaps one of the Muslim leaders who became convinced at Iqbal's proposition of cultural autonomy for Muslim majority provinces. Bhasani must have been convinced that there should be the demand for the autonomy of Bengal (including Assam).

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<sup>238</sup> Maksud, *Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>239</sup> Sheila McDonough, *The Flames of Sinai: Hope and Vision of Iqbal*, (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 2002), p. 155.



At this time, Bhasani asked himself “Why I engage in politics?” The answer he had for himself: “to serve the dispossessed and the most deprived.” He decided that he would devote his life to serving them.<sup>241</sup> This is Bhasani’s idea of *Huqúq al ‘ibád* [the] social part of the teaching he has inherited from his Sufi heritage. In 1932 knowing well that Muslim League is the Party of the aristocrats, like many other Muslim Congress leaders he unenthusiastically joined the Muslim League.<sup>242</sup>

### SECTION 1: HELPING PEASANTS IN SETTLEMENTS

In 1929, Bhasani settled in Assam with his family. In the same year he held his first historic peasant conference with Bengali migrant landless peasants in Bashan Char (island) in the Gopalpara district of Assam. Quraishi says:

Bhasani organized the peasants who were being exploited by the landlords (*zamindars*) and the police. He settled down in Assam on the wasteland of Gaghmari, a few miles from Dubri, in the Goalpara district. He set up yet another establishment in Bhasanir Char...He had tremendous influence among the Hindu and Muslim immigrants alike and was also nicknamed Krishak Bandu (peasant’s friend).<sup>243</sup>

He mainly worked to help the landless peasants to settle and campaigned for the rights of the dispossessed. As a *pir* or revered Sufi elder he was also active in providing spiritual and social services to the poor peasants. Mohammed Azraf illustrates Bhasani’s role as a *pir* politician:

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<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152, 194, 101, 197.

<sup>241</sup> Bhasani’s past recollections on this were recorded later by Maksud in Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69. Bhasani joined the Muslim League in Assam in 1930 but formally in 1937 see Waliullah, “Bichitra Bhasani” (The Strange Character Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.), Mazlu’m Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>243</sup> Raheem Quraishi, The Assam Bloodbath. (Chicago: American Trust Publications, 1984), p. 35.

In [1933], Bhasani was discussing the future plans of his party with his associates.

At this time an Assami Bengali appeared in front of Bhasani and said,

“*Hujur*, my wife is having the pain of delivery for the past three days, but no child is born yet. “Please give me a blessing on a *tabiz*\*, or water”, Bhasani asked if he had a container with water, the man said he had one. Bhasani recited a *Sura* of the Quran and said “knot it with her heap.” The man ran with it, and within ten minutes he returned and said, “A servant of yours is born. Give him a name.” Bhasani said “we will see about a name later. Now you donate some money to my party.” As soon as it was said, he gave Bhasani a note of ten rupee and disappeared.<sup>244</sup>

Bhasani had many mainly spiritual followers he had inherited from his own *pir*. Badiuzzaman recounts that as the chief disciple of Bagdadi, in Assam he had 1,700,000 followers. With these followers in his life he organized many conferences. These followers would bear the expenses of the meetings and conferences he organized.<sup>245</sup> Here unlike most Sufis of the subcontinent, he was playing the role of a haqqani *pir* that is a spiritual Sufi political leader who also fought for peasant’s rights.

One of the secrets of Bhasani’s strength was his capacity to use his spiritual followers as the core group for his political actions. While serving people in Assam, Bhasani also kept himself informed about problems in Bengal and provided social services to the Bengalis. Ibrahim Khan, a contemporary politician and writer wrote:

The flood water had just receded and during that time in my Korotia house ferry, came a person from Assam with a boat. His name was Abdul Hamid Khan. In his boat was loaded about 50 *tons* of rice. He said to me: “Before my home was in Bangladesh, then I went to Assam. Hearing the dangerous flood, I came here with some rice to distribute. Some of it is already distributed and the rest I thought

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\* A *tabiz* is normally a way of Muslim spiritual healing done by writing or uttering some passages of the Quran on a paper or cloth and fold it to tie with the neck or the heap of a person.

<sup>244</sup> Mohammed Azraf, Bhasani “Ak Anonyo Baikito (Bhasani a Unique Personality)” in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu’m Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani*, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>245</sup> Bodiuzzaman, “Mojlum Jononeta Bhasani (The destitute Leader Mawlana Bhasani)” in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu’m Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani*, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 672.

I should distribute after I talk with you.” I said “You did fine...” We had some discussion about helping the flood victims, than he left for his work.<sup>246</sup>

As Bhasani left, Ibrahim Khan, saw some peasants were discussing about him.

Khan recorded their conversation: One peasant asking another peasant about Bhasani

‘Do you know who this person is?’ Some others who knew him answered. ‘He is the famous Mawlana of Bhasan. Don't you see the big *tosbi* (prayer scroll).’ He is a big *fakir* (Muslim mystic). Another peasant was saying in reply and gratitude, ‘Of course! With so much clothe, and other relief materials to distribute among us during this flood disaster he must be a holy angel,’

‘I think so’says another peasant.

‘His ...water in big bucket benefitted many, many had even varified it!’

That the conversation of these Bengali peasents identifies Bhasani as a Muslim mystic is interesting indeed, for it demonstrates his religious spirituality and commitment to helping people in distress while fulfilling his role as a politician.<sup>247</sup>

The population size of Assam at the time Bhasani arrived was recorded as only 25,000 Bengalis and 96,000 Ahomese. The Ahomese, the old stock, was comprised largely by Hindus, Muslims and animists. The Ahomese settlements were in the mountains. The New settlers were mainly from Bengal and lived near the river valleys of Bramaputra. Because of the nature of the settlements there were little contacts between the two groups.<sup>248</sup>

Maksud says, unlike the Bengali peasant migrants, Ahomese were not a very hard working people. For centuries, this landlocked region remained underdeveloped. And so in the beginning, seeing the changes in Assam economy made by the hardworking Bengali peasants, Ahomese landlords welcomed them. These new Bengali Hindu and

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<sup>246</sup>Syed Irfanul Bari, Mawlana Bhasanir Bhumika (The Role of Mawlana Bhasani) (Bengali). (Santosh: Tangail Press, 1978), p. 1.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid.

Muslim settlements led to a tremendous demographic change.<sup>249</sup> Bhasani played an important role in this transformation, but his role in Assam is historic for another reason that he fought against the line system.

Mofizul Islam says:

As the demography was starting to change a section of the Ahomese aristocrat Hindu class became alarmed by the growing Bengali Muslim presence. Unlike the Hindus, Muslims eat beef and they slaughter cows for consumption. The Hindu *zamindars* found it intolerable. They forced the Muslim subjects to pledge that they will not slaughter any cows. If such thing is done the peasant in question would lose his right to own land.<sup>250</sup>

A growing Hindu-Muslim communal hatred generated during the anti-Partition movement of the 1910's in Bengal had already been exported to Assam. To stop Bengali migration, with British approval in 1920 the line system was introduced.<sup>251</sup> Mufizul Islam says,

A retired Bengali civil servant, named Gopal Mukherjee, followed by Debobroto Majumder, writing in Bengali newspapers in Calcutta called Bengalis from Mymensing "the barbarian Mymensinghi Muslims causing problem for the "Babu" [Hindu gentlemen] in Assam."<sup>252</sup>

Bhasani had seen similar violations of religious rights in Mymensing by the Hindu *zamindar* and his protests led to his expulsion from Bengal. This problem between Ahomese *Zaminders* and the peasants began even before Bhasani settled in Assam. In the

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<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>249</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>250</sup> Mofizul Islam. *Upomahadesh Rajniti O Baikthito* (Politics and the Personalities of the Subcontinent, part 19, (Dhaka: Boi Bitan, 1985), p. 34.

<sup>251</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, p. 37.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35. (Emphasis added).

beginning the repressive measures were mild but gradually it started to take the shape of serious communal problem.

## SECTION 2: BHASANI'S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE BANGALI KHADAO ANDOLON (BENGALI EVICTION MOVEMENT)

The majority of peasants settled in Assam were Bengali Muslims from the Mymensingh district. This was identified by the Assam government as a "migrant peasant problem." In order to make the line system effective, the Assam government led by the Congress Party started a xenophobic campaign claiming that Bengali settlement would cause the Assamese to lose their culture and eventually become a minority in Assam.<sup>253</sup> Assam government's treatment of the Bengali migrants was a matter of discrimination. The hatred became so alarming that Assamese *zamindars* now started destroying the settlements that were already built. First, Bengalis were identified as outsiders and their houses were burned down, or their crops were destroyed by elephants. Their houses were identified as illegal settlements and there was a movement called "*Bangali khadao*" (send the Bengalis back home). This took the shape of even forcefully evicting the Ahomi Muslims (old stock Ahomi Muslims) and the new settlers alike from Assam. It turned into a serious communal problem.<sup>254</sup>

Bhasani saw this as an unjust measure taken by the government representing the *zamindars*. Instead of remaining quiet, he stood against this government policy,

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<sup>253</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 37. Also see Rafiqul Islam. "Sritir Minare Mawlana Bhasani" (Mawlana Bhasani in my Memory) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani). op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-102.

protesting against the resulting atrocities. He justified his fight against the line system on the grounds that

The earth is for all humanity, like the sun light, the air, rain, water; land is also a gift of God. This gift is not for any particular person, not for any tribe or any community; it is for the consumption of human beings. Human beings, as the best creation of the almighty God, (*Ashraf al- Makluqín*) are only his representatives. Those who are trying to deny God's gift to human beings are working against the greatness of Him. We will restore this Divinely given gift of God. ... We will not tolerate any third party's interference in this. <sup>255</sup>

This is clearly Bhasani's Sufi religious expression of *rubúbiyah*. But ignoring his criticism of the government measures against the peasants, the police force of the government of Assam led the destruction on the Bengali peasant settlement.

Abul Kalam Shamsuddin who was with Bhasani during this time wrote:

They were not happy destroying the major part of the area. They also set fire in each and every house. In doing so, they did not even give the people time to remove their household goods from the houses. As a result these unfortunate people became helpless and destitute. <sup>256</sup>

Instead of leaving Assam out of fear, seeing this misery, Bhasani resolved that he would not leave Assam until justice was served for the migrant peasants. Thus, Bhasani's struggle (*jihad*) against the "line system" began. <sup>257</sup> Maksud says:

At first he tried a negotiated settlement with the authorities, there was no result. The concerned authorities did not heed to his demands. Finally, he decided in his words "*jihad* (struggle) and only *jihad* can save people from the *zul'm* (oppression) by the *za'lim* (oppressor)." <sup>258</sup>

Using Islamic vocabulary he said the fight was against the *za'lim*, to get rid of *zul'm*" and that his *jihad* was against oppression. Mohammed Walliullah says he did it

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<sup>255</sup> Mofizul Islam, *Upomohadesher Rajniti O. Baikthitto*. (Politics and Personality of the Subcontinent) (Bengali), (Dhaka: Printing House, 1994), p. 41.

<sup>256</sup> Abul Kalam Samsuddin Sansadia "Rajniti Mawlana Bhasani", (Mawlana Bhasani in Constitutional Politics), *Dainik Bangla*, November 17, 1993.

<sup>257</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

because, he was the leader of the downtrodden.<sup>259</sup> It seems that he had his notion of class struggle using Islamic terms.

Bhasani began to unite the migrant peasants in order to protest against the oppression of the government. He formed an organization called the Assam Peasant and Labourer's Association and became the President of the association. This association organized meetings in different places in Assam to mobilize public opinion and protest against anti-migrant government actions.<sup>260</sup> Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, an eye witness on the scene, explains the devastation caused by the Assam government: "This huge area was a village. No house was spared of fire. They were burned to ashes. I heard they used elephants to even destroy the crop."<sup>261</sup>

At Bhasani's initiative there were also debates taking place in the Assam national Assembly. In 1937 there was a proposal in the National assembly by Monwar Ali, for discussion of the disadvantages of the line system.<sup>262</sup> The Assembly became divided over the proposal. The debate created a crisis in the government. If the Congress party led government supported the dissolution of the line system, it would have upset the Ahomia aristocrat Hindu class. If it supported maintaining the system, it would cause dissatisfaction among both the migrant Bengalis and Ahomi Muslims. Bhasani's motive to fight against xenophobia and racism, steams from Islamic understanding of the unity of man. Kamal uddin Ahmad says: "Bhasani's arguments were on humanitarian concerns.

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<sup>259</sup> Mohammed Waliullah. "Bichitra Bhasani," (The Strange Character Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.), Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>260</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>261</sup> Abul Kalam Samsuddin, "Mawlana Bhasani o Assamer Line Protha", (Mawlana Bhasani and Assame's Line System) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., pp. 20.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

On the other hand the opposing group's arguments were based on regionalism, narrow nationalism, and on suspicion of the so-called outsiders."<sup>263</sup>

Although in Assam Bhasani was mainly defending the rights of the peasants, he was in favour of defending the rights of all the dispossessed, be it the Bengalis or the Ahomis. He was the voice of the dispossessed. For example in 1938 as an elected MP he said:

Observing the present situation, I think in cooperating with the British government, the Congress Party coalition or some aristocratic government minister or governor, it is completely impossible to expect any benefit for the poor.<sup>264</sup>

In 1937 election he was elected to the parliament in the South Dubri Bengali settlement. Speaking English was seen in parliament as a sign of aristocracy. But unlike the other politicians Bhasani spoke using the language of the people he represented.

As a representative of the people he was the first person to deliver speech in the parliament in Bengali. Despite the fact that Bengali and Ahomi were the mother tongue of the Bengalis and the Ahomis respectively, everybody spoke in English.<sup>265</sup> Bhasani demanded the recognition of the cultural rights of Bengalis. According to Maksud, since Bengalis comprise a sizable population, Bhasani insisted that Bengali language be one of the languages of Assam and in the Assam Assembly. Indeed, today "as a result of this, Bengali is recognized with Ahomis as one of the languages of the people."<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Kamaluddin Ahmad, "Songshadia Rajnititae Mawlana Bhasani", (Role of Mawlana Bhasani in Constitutional politics), Dainik Bangla November 17, 1993, Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. op.cit., p. 43.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>265</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p.43,



Bhasani was an excellent parliamentarian. At the request of Bhasani on 8th September 1937 Jogendra Chandra Nath the MP from south Goalpara and a few other MP's placed a non-governmental proposal on the condition of the Gopalpara sub division. There were three other speakers on this proposal all of whom spoke in English. Bhasani spoke only in Bengali. Maksud says, his insistence on the language rights of Bengalis left an instance and paved the way for Assamese Bengalis to still remember him with respect.<sup>267</sup> Bhasani's main concerns were the peasants. In the Parliament he argued,

Honorable speaker, my friend honorable Jogendranath raised the issue of the Goalpara peasants rights reformation bill. I would like to talk about the importance of the bill. In this century, when people all over the world are demanding freedom, the *zamindars* here are keeping hundreds of thousands of peasants in the status of slaves. Due the introduction of the Permanent Settlement Act at the inception of the British rule in India, at the expense of the suffering of landless peasants, today the *zamindars* are the owners of lands. The peasants do not even have the right to use his property as a market. If a market is allowed, when it brings some income, the peasant does not have the right to enjoy it. The *zamindar* will enjoy it. If a peasant sells his land to another person, the profit goes to the *zamindar*.”<sup>268</sup>

After explaining the problems of the peasant's rights act he continued to demonstrate the condition of the peasants under this system. He said:

This year in the *Shalmara Thana* (region) of our Gopalpara district, in the flood affected areas alone, 1078 people died of cholera. The *zamindars* are busy eating delicious food and living in luxury and they don't care about other people. The *zamindars* for the sake of improving their own health will take necessary measures but they don't care about the condition of the peasants. That is why I say that the peasants need to have full rights. When a peasant improves the land by hardwork, the peasant is the rightful owner. He should have full ownership rights over his land.”<sup>269</sup>

He also criticized the government that served the interest of the *zamindars*. He said:

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

The capitalist and imperialist government does not heed the problems of the poor peasants. This government continues to allow the *zamindars* to have the power of giving certificate. When *zamindars* can give certificate, it means they have the license to use machine gun to collect revenue.<sup>270</sup>

Under pressure from Bhasani, the Congress Party coalition government at first decided to make concessions to the Bengali peasants. However, later on instead of conceding, the government used repressive measures. They continued their policy to evict the migrant Bengalis. In response to this, at the initiative of Bhasani, on November 19th, 1939, the Assam provincial Muslim League Council held a meeting in Garmari of Gopalpara. At the meeting Bhasani identified the atrocities committed by the Congress Party government on the Bengalis and compared them to "Hitler's repression of the Jews."<sup>271</sup>

Bhasani's fight both inside the assembly and outside was very much felt in Assam. Bhasani was branded by the Assam Congress Party government a "fanatical immigrant."<sup>272</sup> It is true the majority of his followers were landless Muslim peasants. By now he also became the President of the Muslim League and normally used Islamic vocabulary in his Muslim sermon type speeches and his Bengali Muslim dress may gave him the normal look of a "fanatic." However, Bhasani was fighting against what he regarded as injustice by the government is it by the British, Hindus or Muslims. Maksud says: "If Bhasani had not gotten involved in the anti -line system politics of Assam, he could have been a more famous politician."<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Kamaluddin Ahmad, "Songshodio Rajnititae Mawlana Bhasani"(Mawlana Bhasani in the Constitutional Politics), in Dainik Bangla, 17 November, 1993.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>272</sup> Manmath Nath Das, Partition and Independence of India, op. cit., p.121.

<sup>273</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit. p.37.

Before Bhasani became the leader of the Muslim League, like the congress Party in Assam, Muslim League also was in the hands of the aristocratic class. After he joined the Muslim League, it became more popular among the peasants and became a powerful force in Assam.

In 1937 Muslim League formed a coalition government with Sir Sadullah as the premier of Assam. In 1938 Sadullah had to resign and Congress formed a new coalition government with Gopinath Borduli as the premier. From 1937-47 the elected government changed many times between the Congress and the Muslim League. In this either Sir Sadullah or Gopinath Borduloui became the premier. Bhasani however, lost faith in both governments.<sup>274</sup>

In a meeting in Karimgonj regarding his differences of opinion he said “the difference between Congress premier Gopinath Bordoloui and the Muslim League premier Sadullah is one of the cap; one does not wear a cap while the other one does wear cap. Sadullah will not get my support just because he wears a cap!”<sup>275</sup> Bhasani was the President of the Muslim League, but did not compromise with the premier elected from his own party. In showing his central concern, about peasant’s rights, he did not hesitate to criticize even Sir Sadullah’s Muslim League government. He genuinely fought for justice. As a result he was jailed for a total of eight years in Assam.<sup>276</sup> It seems that even though he was the president of the Muslim League, he was not interested in ‘party’s rule of the oligarchy’. He was interested in his vision to serve the interest of the poor.

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<sup>274</sup> Abdul Matin, Amar Dristitae Mawlana (My Observation of Mawlana), op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

In 1939 when Sadullah formed a Muslim League coalition government, for the third time, Bhasani was equally critical of Sadullah for not being sympathetic to the peasants' rights. He criticized his government in the Muslim League meeting and got a promise from the Premier to its members that two hundred thousand landless peasants would be given lands. Bhasani revealed this through a statement in the newspaper.<sup>277</sup> This caused panic within the Muslim League government. To keep its promise the government had to allocate land to close to 100,000 peasants.<sup>278</sup>

Bhasani was equally active outside the national assembly. To protest against government measures Bhasani would organize conferences and meetings. Rafiqul Islam describes one such interesting but unusual type of meeting by Bhasani to protest government measures:

We had seen some people were taking the same way as us. I noticed them that they took bags and light baggages with them as if visiting the relative's house. Then they were also carrying cooking utensils and a goat. I was surprised and curiously asked their destination. They said they were going to attend Bhasani's meeting. But I was curious about why it was necessary to bring cooking utensils. When asked, they gave me a strange look, as if I were a fool to ask such a question. So without further questioning I started walking.<sup>279</sup>

Rafiqul Islam continues:

As I got to the venue, the unanswered question about the utensils was resolved. I saw there were spots where arrangements were made to cook food. I had seen by the side of the tent that there were big mats on which cooked rice, lentils, egg plant, potatoes etc were put. Not far from there some goats and cows were stocked. I asked my colleague Anwar, about the mystery of the cow and the goats. He said they brought them for Bhasani, as gift. I knew that this tradition is prevalent in the observance of death anniversary of a *pir* but I have not heard of it

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<sup>277</sup> The Dawn, 25 October, 1946. Quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>278</sup> The Star of India, 25 February, 1946. Also see Maksud, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, p. 45.

<sup>279</sup> Rafiqul Islam "Sritir Minare, Mawlana Bhasani" (Mawlana Bhasani in my Memories) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 105.

for a political meeting. An older person added that, they all respect Bhasani as a *pir*. That was why they voluntarily brought things that they could afford.<sup>280</sup>

Tablighi Jama'at use Bhasani's type of simple methods to mobilize devotees. Its techniques were innovated by Ilyas, the Deobani *alim* in the 1920's. Bhasani's use of a simpler way to mobilize his followers in his political leadership is indeed an innovation in the political sphere. It seems that his thoughts of helping the destitutes were contextualized in his political actions and his style translated that into a political tradition.

Bhasani was a self taught person. Islam describes Bhasani's openmindedness as he met him during the preparation for one of the political meetings:

...by this time Bhasani had arrived by a cow driven cart. Hearing his arrival we went to see him. As we approached, I saw him reading a book. I was curious and I asked him "what book are you reading *Hujur*?" He looked at me and with a smile said, "I am learning English." He was reading an elementary English book. At that time Mawlana would be between 40-50 years old. He was learning English and he did not have any hesitation about it and easily said it. All of us were surprised at this. This small incident reminds me of his greatness.<sup>281</sup>

Rafiqul describes the speech:

First some junior level leaders spoke, followed by Bhasani's speech. Ninety percent of the attendants were peasants and labourers. I saw that the meeting was well disciplined. There was no unruliness or lawlessness as is normally the case in most outdoor political meeting. He promised to build a fort to fight the enemy.<sup>282</sup>

Bhasani's strong measures against the government had provoked a crisis and the Congress government had to resign again. In 1942, the Sadullah government was reinstalled.

On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1942 a government circulation made the line system almost ineffective. Bimal Chandra Dev says: "...to such an extent that the line system became

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<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

totally defunct.”<sup>283</sup> As a result of Bhasani’s efforts, the Sadullah government realized that if the line system was loosened, the hard working peasants would help develop the economy of Assam.

In 1944, the Sadullah government was defeated by the Bordolui Congress government. In parliament Bhasani proposed a reform on a priority basis. He suggested that land should be distributed first to the Ahomi landless tribal people, then to the Ahomi Hindus and Muslims, then to the migrant Bengalis.<sup>284</sup> Despite the fact that Bhasani demanded equal rights for the peasants, whether Bengali or Assamese, he however acknowledged Ahomi landless tribal people as a priority.

An MP named Rabindra threatened Bhasani that he and his group would lead a campaign to fight against the peasants. Bhasani replied:

Honorable Srijukto Robi Kachari Babu said he will struggle against the peasants. We have not come here to fight. We are not here to fight with each other. If you have the power to fight why don’t you go to fight against the British and gain independence? There is no point to fighting with an illiterate and helpless destitute immigrant.<sup>285</sup>

Maksud notes that in this speech, “one would not find any trace of communalism but his identification with the underdog, the landless peasants.”<sup>286</sup>

#### Bengali Eviction Movement by the Mohashoba:

From 1945-46, Ahomis National Mohashoba, a Hindu communal group became intensely active in the Bengali eviction movement. This organization based its movement

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<sup>283</sup> Dev and Lahari, “The Line System of Assam”, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, op. cit.

<sup>284</sup> Report of the workings of the Assam Legislative Assembly 1937-45. Vol. 1. (Shillong: The Assam Government Press, 1946). Also see Kamal uddin Ahmad, “Songshodio Rajnititae Mawlana Bhasani”, Dainik Bangla, 17 November, 1993; Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

on 7 conditions: (1) to determine the difference between the Ahomese and the non-Ahomese; (2) To give priority to Ahomese in education and land distribution; (3) To demand a law prohibiting people entering Assam; (4) To deprive the people of Sylhet district, who are mostly Muslims, from employment; (5) To deprive citizenship rights of people who are from outside Assam and to give them identification card as outsiders;. (6) To demand a law limiting the rights of outsiders to sell property.<sup>287</sup>

Dev notes that during this time, on one hand there was the Bengali eviction movement by Aombika Giri Roy Chowdhury, the General Secretary of Mohashoba, on the other hand there was Bhasani's continuing demand that the rights of the migrant peasants be respected. The Congress government instead of loosening the line system it took more initiatives to make it effective. As a result, indiscriminately Bengali houses were destroyed, and property was damaged in some areas. Bhasani in a circular distributed among his supporters claimed that approximately 150,000 people were affected by the line system and its atrocities.<sup>288</sup>

As the eviction of Bengalis from Mongoldoi, Borpota, and Gouhati continued, Bhasani began using other means of pressuring the government. He started fasting until death. The news of his fast caused great anxiety among the peasants. It even caused some concern in Bengal. On the 31st of May, 1946 Bhasani broke his fast after requests from the leaders of both Assam and Bengal. After this he visited Mongloi. Despite the

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<sup>286</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Dev and Lahari, "The Line System of Assam," Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, p. 212. Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit. p. 47.

devastation, seeing him present among them, the peasants found their moral strength renewed and they started rebuilding their houses.<sup>289</sup>

By now Jinnah became the President of All India Muslim League. Iqbal was increasingly ill and sometimes Jinnah visited Iqbal and other times Iqbal wrote to Jinnah about the future course of action for Muslims of India. Iqbal's concerns at this point were primarily for a Muslim state in the north western regions of India. Iqbal died in 1938.

Jinnah wrote about Iqbal's ideas regarding Muslims of India:

His views were substantially in consonance with my own and had finally led me to the same conclusions as a result of careful examinations and study of the constitutional problems facing India and found expression in due course in the united will of Muslim India, as adumbrated in the Lahore resolution of the All India Muslim...<sup>290</sup>

In the years just preceding his death, the poet was doing all he could to encourage the Indian Muslims to become self-consciously aware of their need to struggle for the maintenance of their cultural autonomy.<sup>291</sup>

McDonough says:

For Iqbal, the birth of a desire for self-determination in the heart of north-west Indian Islam was a fact Nehru was ignoring and refusing to deal with realistically. Iqbal thought that Nehru's belief that religions would just wither away was a kind of socialist naivete.<sup>292</sup>

By 1946 the "juggling act" of keeping Hindus and Muslims together was over. Jinnah and Nehru both were now busy in drawing support to their respective plan for Pakistan and India. During this time Jinnah came for a brief tour of Bengal and Assam.

<sup>289</sup> Star of India, May 26, 1946. Also see Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.* p. 46.

<sup>290</sup> "Iqbal Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan," quoted in Sheila McDonough's The Flames of Sinai, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>291</sup> McDonough's The Flames of Sinai, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., p.153.



Bhasani met Jinnah in Sylhet. While describing the inhuman treatment of the peasants by the Assam government for Jinnah, Bhasani broke into tears with emotion.<sup>293</sup> M. A.

Ispahani described the meeting between Jinnah and Bhasani in his book Quid-e-Azam

Jinnah as I Know Him:

[That] evening the rush of visitors had ended and Quaid was alone in his room. I went to speak to him before dinner. I referred to the conversation with Bhasani at noon and told him how deeply I was impressed by the sincerity of the Provincial President, adding that if we had more active and enthusiastic Presidents like the Mawlana in the other provinces of India, men who were willing to suffer and make sacrifices for the cause and not work for personal benefit or aggrandizement, the Muslim League would, indeed, be a stronger and much more active political organization.

He told me that he did not agree with my opinion of the Mawlana. He thought that men like him were not fit to be leaders and could not be relied upon to deliver the goods, "sentimental nonsense and emotion have no place in politics..." He said, "politics my boy, is a game of chess and evils cannot be cured by tears but only by hard work, courage and determination. The tap of emotionalism is easy to turn on and not so easy to turn off. With emotion a nation's policy might become the first casualty."

"This man", he added, "may be a good preacher and may draw tears from his audience but he is not a good leader, particularly in times of crisis when the head has to be kept cool and the eyes dry to see clearly and to arrive at decisions."

He ended by saying that he did not consider the Mawlana fit to be President of a political organization like the Muslim League and the sooner the

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<sup>293</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 78.

League freed itself of his leadership and of men of his temperament, the better would it be.”<sup>294</sup>

According to Mohammed Azraf after Bhasani’s entry into the Muslim League of the aristocrats, it changed from a party of aristocrats into a mass party. It was because the “oppressed populace” of Assam came into contact with Bhasani, that this new spirit started to develop in the Muslim League.<sup>295</sup> Bhasani’s cries fell in the deaf ear of Jinnah. Perhaps what C. R. Das understood Bhasani’s concerns for destitute peasants, Jinnah simply took him for granted as a Muslim peasant leader. Jinnah failed to understand the Bengali nature of Bhasani.

Indeed, Jinnah could not understand Bhasani’s emotion. Abul Mansur Ahmad observed Jinnah a secularist, “abandoned the Congress Party due to Gandhi’s adoption of spirituality in politics against pure reason.”<sup>296</sup>

During this time due to Bengali leader’s increasing assertions on the cultural rights of Bengali’s in the future destiny of the Indian Muslims, Jinnah dropped A. K. Fazlul Haq from the Muslim League leadership. Maksud observes that two years after Bhasani’s encounter with Jinnah, the Muslim League would not have survived as an organization “of the people” without Bengali leaders like Bhasani. So Bhasani was tolerated by Jinnah until the partition in 1947. Mohammed Waliullah says, “Mawlana

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<sup>294</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79.

<sup>295</sup> Mohammed Azraf “Bhasani Ak Omnanyo Bactetao” (Bhasani a Unique Personality) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu’im Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>296</sup> Abul Mansur Ahamed, Amer Dhaka Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor ( The way I saw Fifty Years of Politics) op. cit. p. 226.

was not a talker or an only make-believe- destitute leader; he was a mass leader.”<sup>297</sup> Indeed, in independent Pakistan, without leaders like Bhasani, the Muslim League was turned into a party of the Jinnah appointed *Urdu* speaking aristocratic class and because of this nature it soon lost its mass support.

In 1946 during this crisis period, the “revolutionary Bhasani” could not compromise with the Sadullah government of the Muslim League on the question of the line system. As the President of the Muslim League he was under pressure to support the Sadullah government. He said “[The] Muslim League and its ministry is for the people, I cannot sacrifice the interest of the people to keep unity among Muslim League members, or to save the Ministry.”<sup>298</sup>

Bhasani acted as a *Rabbáni* (server of God) directed to serve people. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin wrote:

In Assam in 1946 the Bengali eviction movement was going on in full force. Hearing the news that about 20 miles from Gohati a Bengali village was destroyed, Bhasani said ‘Lets go. You will see by your own eyes’ Mawlana took Abdul Matin Chowdhury and Mohammed Ali with us. When we started, common people did not know about our plans. We drove fast in our jeep. What we saw is something I will never forget. A whole village was burned down completely. Not even one house remained standing. The villagers were standing under the open sky in the mid day sun. The communal forces had destroyed even small items like the earthen water jugs. We parked our jeep and started touring the place. In one burnt down house there were 8 to 10 people. Suddenly, among them one 60-70 year old men cried loudly and came to Bhasani saying: “Abdul Hamid, where have you been for such a long time!” When I close my eyes I still remember the event. Mawlana and the rest of us could not stop our tears. On our way back people had already learned of our visit. In some places on our return journey, people had gathered with oil pots and water buckets. Bhasani stopped in every place and breathed air into the water and oil pots as a symbol of spiritual blessing. People

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<sup>297</sup> A. Z. M Shamsul Alam, *Mawlana Bhasani, the Destitute Leader*, in Quayyum (ed.), *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani)*, op. cit., p. 364.

<sup>298</sup> Maksud, *Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 78.

had also gathered some money for him. He would take it and distribute it in other places. This way it took us until around 10 or 11 at night to get to Gohati.<sup>299</sup>

When Bhasani was the President of the Assam Muslim League, he remained deeply involved in Assam politics, but he was also engaged in the politics of the subcontinent. He was present at the historic Lahore Conference of the Muslim League where (see Appendix D) a resolution was adopted that provinces with Muslim majority, including Bengal should form separate states.

#### Mongoldoi Moha Sommolan (The Great Convention of Mongoli)

On 26<sup>th</sup> of June, 1946, in order to create unity among the peasants Bhasani organized a great convention on the coronation ground. He was the main speaker. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin wrote:

After a two day train journey we finally got to our destination, Tajpur station. It was in the evening. ...When we got to the house it was quite late at night. ...The next morning when we woke up and looked outside, wherever I looked there were people. After breakfast, Mawlana and I rode on a huge elephant. We toured the different areas of the city and tried to estimate the number of people attending the conference...In my estimate it was around 200,000. Seeing the number of people, I tried to estimate the popularity of Bhasani.

...Mawlana in the midst of applause, lectured for approximately two hours. In his speech there was the criticism of Assam government, and serious condemnation of the police brutalities. ...

Another thing that drew my attention was that in the house there were a huge stock of rice and outside the house I saw that some cows and goats were also stocked. When I enquired someone said, "People brought their own food." After feeding for two days, this is all left." Hearing this, I was stunned. Seeing me surprised some others said "there is nothing to be surprised at this. This happened at every meeting of Mawlana Bhasani. The next day we went to eat again. Bhasani didn't join us. I was shocked to hear that he would not breakfast until the government stopped the Bengali eviction movement. As a result of this for the time being, the government stopped the eviction process."<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Abu Jaffer Shamsuddin, "Otut Dinar Sriti" (Memories of the Past). Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>300</sup> Confidential file No. RD 56 of 1946(AS) in Dev and Lahari, *op. cit.*

Bhasani performed his second *haj* in 1939. It is interesting to know what Bazlus Satter reports about Bhasani in Mecca that a Saudi police officer arrested a pilgrim and was escorting this Indian Muslim to a tent. When he enquired about the man, the policeec he said that the man failed to pay the requisite tax that had been imposed that year. Satter tried to convince the police that the man was pennyless, and that the tax was introduced for the first time. He went to plead for him with the other officer responsible sitting in a tent. The officer said he could do nothing: He said

“Go to the King sitting in that tent.” As I went to the tent where the king was, I saw a man pleading for atleast 300 people arrested for not being able to pay. This was Bhasani. After a lengthy deliberation with Bhasani, the king was convinced and the prisonrs were released, on condition that this was going to be the last time he would tolerate it.<sup>301</sup>

Perhaps Bhasani was relentless in helping the helpless. Bazlus Satter whom I interviewed in Chittagong, Bangladesh, restating the above story said, “Even abroad he fought for the rights of the helpless.”<sup>302</sup>

#### Bhasani's Law Disobeying Movement

Maksud reports that the Congress government now took stronger measures to evict Bengali peasants: Shortly after the rainy season in 1946, the government started the campaign again. Bhasani urged the landless peasants to disobey the law, “Stop paying taxes,” to settle in places wherever they could find empty land. He said “just as we have to get rid of the British from India, so also must we rid ourselves of the tyrannical Bordoloui government. It is human beings in their role as *za'lim* that cause obstruction to justice.” The oppression became so open that on the 7th of November, 1946, at a meeting

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<sup>301</sup> Bazlus Satter, “Amer Sritite Mawlana Bhasanir Haj” (Mawlana Bhasanir Hij in My Memory) (Bengali) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>302</sup> This is from my interview of Bazlus Satter in Chittagong, July, 1995.

of the regional President and the General Secretariate of the Assam Muslim League, a proposal initiated by Bhasani was adopted condemning the Congress rule as comprised of "tyranny, misrule, and atrocities."<sup>303</sup> The government policy now became more specific on communal line. The main target of the eviction was the Muslim peasants. Assam Herald wrote:

The Muslims of Assam are stunned to see that in such a dangerous movement, the galant Congress Ministers of Assam are out to prove their chivalry by torturing the helpless elements, thousands of whom had already been served with notices to quit. It may be that they would not leave their dear hearths and homes without resistance and any amount of torture on these ill -fated people may lead to serious communal tensions all over the province....Does your Ministry propose to convert this yet happy province into a veritable hell of looming arson, plunder and massacre?<sup>304</sup>

Bhasani's call for civil disobedience in Assam continued. The All India Muslim League headed by Jinnah did not take any concrete action. But the Bengal Muslim League pledged to support Bhasani's call. Bhasani was invited to attend the January 7, 1946 Council meeting of the Bengal Muslim League. There he forcefully made his point. Bhasani expressed his plan for an all out struggle on the lines of civil disobedience movement to stop the tyrannical policy of eviction..."<sup>305</sup> The government was unable to stop Bhasani's continuing protest. A confidential government document reads: "The district administration was apparently embarrassed by the show of strength displayed by the immigrants under the leadership of Abdul Hamid Khan."<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> The Statesman, 9th November 1946. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>304</sup> The Assam Herald, 16th November 1947. Also in Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. P. 52.

<sup>305</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p.52.

Despite his philosophical differences Bhasani was always appreciative of some Congress Party leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Mawlana Azad as is evident in his informal talks with his followers, but during this crisis in Assam he criticized them bitterly in newspaper statements. He condemned Gandhi for his silence. He said "how can Bapu (Gandhi) be the great soul (Mohatma) when he is silent on the eviction of Bengalis from Assam."<sup>307</sup>

In January of 1947, a Bengal -Assam emergency executive council meeting of the Muslim League was held. Bhasani presided over the meeting. At the meeting the situation was labeled as "anti-Bengal conspiracy" rather than a "communal problem." They also stated that the Assam government's policy of oppression was a result of the leaders following the traditional British policy of oppression. At the meeting Bhasani particularly noted the contribution of the Bengali peasants to the economic development of Assam and said:

They have filled the government exchequer and the government's income was raised from Rs 45 lakhs to one crore and six lakhs. This is the contribution of the Bengali *Kishans* (peasants). The government of Assam is trying to hide their anti-Bengali bias by giving it a communal colour but deceptions can not hold for long.<sup>308</sup>

The Assam Herald wrote in an editorial:

An anti-Bengali bias co-mingled with a desire to establish a caste Hindu Assamese hegemony over the non-Assamese population have led the Government of Assam to harass the landless immigrants, and even deny their the right to have a heart and home.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> The Assam Herald, 8 February, 1947; Also in Dev and Lahri, op.cit. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.53.

<sup>308</sup> The Assam Herald, 8 February, 1947.

<sup>309</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 54.

Among the Bengali peasants, as well as among the peasant leaders working with Bhasani, there were many Hindus and Hindu leaders such as Abolakanta Gupta, Brojendra Narayan Chowdhury and others.<sup>310</sup> Bhasani claimed that approximately 18,000 homes had been destroyed by the government.<sup>311</sup>

Bhasani's direct clash with the Assam Congress government over the line system and their "oppressive measures", led him to believe that the situation of the destitute Bengali peasant's problem would not be resolved by the landless peasants of Assam remaining with India. Thus, despite his differences with Jinnah and his Pakistan proposal, Bhasani joined the other Muslim League leaders in the fight to bring part of Assam into Pakistan.

#### Bengal-Assam Conference of 1947

Bengalis in the Brahmaputra valley, under Bhasani's leadership, turned the deep forest and valley into settlements. But from 1942-47 was a trying period for Bengalis. Bhasani was their only support. On the 3rd and 4th March 1947 Bhasani organized the Bengal -Assam Conference in Dhubri Assam. Mahmud Ali wrote:

The conference was in an open field. There, many new huts were made. In the middle was a huge podium. Some huts did have roofs and others did not. The huts with roof were for the guests. Mawlana used to tour the quarters to look after the needs of the guests and would move from one hut to another. ...Suddenly it came to my notice that Mawlana was fetching water from the well and filling huge buckets to facilitate baths for the invited guests. There were hundreds of guests, delegates and workers. To prepare food for them, rice, vegetables, and other kitchen items were ready. We soon saw that they were all arranged. He had

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Mohammed Azraf, Bhasani Ak Annaya Baiktitta ( Bhasani a Unique Personality) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p.54.



already instructed his followers. There were also huge amounts of fish and meat.<sup>312</sup>

After the convention the organizers wanted to parade a procession in the city.

Mohammed Ali wrote:

A total of approximately 20 thousand people were in the procession. There was a huge number of armed police in the city streets. Many members of the Legislative Assembly were also present who along with Bhasani led the procession. ...<sup>313</sup>

By the time we toured the city it was evening. As the procession was returning to the convention centre our way was obstructed by a huge armed police force.

... It was also time to do the evening prayer. We all stood in line in the street and did the prayer. ...But after the prayer the *dua* (prayer, separate from *salat*) was the most important part. It was quite touchy. (The *dua* was done by Bhasani).<sup>314</sup>

People feared that Bhasani will be arrested by the police. Surprisingly, in this meeting when the prayer was over, the police did not interfere with the return to the convention centre. Bhasani explained about the problem with their government in the *dua* but discouraged them from attacking anybody.<sup>315</sup>

It is interesting to note that Bhasani often used saying *dua* as a pretext to avoid arrest. During the *dua* he would convince the people present, as well as the police of his mission. This was a style continued by Bhasani all along his political career through

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<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>313</sup> Mohammed Ali, "Sritir Pata Khulae" (Turning the Pages of History) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani)*, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>314</sup> *Weekly Purbodesh*, 1962. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>315</sup> *Weekly Purbodesh*, 1962. Also in Maksud. *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 56.

Pakistan and Bangladesh periods.<sup>316</sup> Bhasani's this style is different from nonpolitical popular Sufi leaders who feed the poor and did *dhikir*.

On the 5th of March 1947, Bhasani urged all the Legislative Assembly members and the other leaders to start a "non-violent and non-communal movement."<sup>317</sup> According to Maksud, "during this time Bhasani, like Gandhi, also used the "non-violent, non-cooperation" as a technique."<sup>318</sup>

Mahmud Ali said:

He scheduled a meeting to start the civil disobedience movement in the Darang district. He sensed a possible arrest. On that day, in order to escape from the police detectives he disguised himself to cross the Bramaputra River by boat. Then he took a bullock cart covered his face and body like a driver of a cart, and appeared in Tajpur town Hall. The people present and the police detectives that were looking for him everywhere, were all surprised to see him at the meeting on time!. A couple of thousand people were gathered there. He instructed the people present that to attain justice they must go ahead even if they have to go to jail. He also instructed them to go to the land from which they had been evicted. He specifically instructed them to keep the peace and avoid communal clashes. He said: "Please keep in mind that the unity amongst the Hindus and Muslims is important." He bitterly criticized the British imperialism and said "this fight is not against any community but against...British imperialism and against the Congress ministry."<sup>319</sup>

On March 10, 1947 Bhasani was arrested on charges of endangering state security. Before the arrest he was instructed to leave the Darang district. Bhasani declined. As a reaction to his arrest there were angry demonstrations and protests against his arrest all over Bengal and Assam.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Irfanul Bari revealed this information during my conversation with him about Bhasani's leadership styles.

<sup>317</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>319</sup> Mahmud Ali, "Resurgent Assam"; Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, p. 57.-58.

<sup>320</sup> From confidential document of Assam government #35. Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

However, as a result of Bhasani's arrest at this crucial time the movement started to weaken. At his arrest, the Muslim League members of the Legislative Assembly and the National Assembly resigned en masse, except one. Sadullah met with Bordoloi and requested Bhasani's release on behalf of the Muslim League. The central government of India was determined not to bow down to Bhasani's civil disobedience movement and the interim central government Congress ministry's Bhollobhai Patel decided to take even more stronger measures. He assured the Assam government that the central government would give them all the help necessary. He instructed the government not to surrender to Bhasani's followers.<sup>321</sup>

The Congress Party and the *zamindar's* influence were too strong for Bhasani to win his demands. But on the 21st of June 1947 in the face of growing unrest, Bhasani was released from Gohati jail. India and Pakistan received their independence in 1947. The district of Sylhet (excluding the Karimganj subdivision) went with East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). The rest of Assam went with the Indian union.<sup>322</sup> After his release he crossed the border with his great number of followers and went directly to the village in Santosh of Tangail in then East Pakistan, and settled there permanently.<sup>323</sup>

In Assam as part of his fight for justice, he fought for peasant's rights. Communist party supporters also supported the peasant's cause. The Communist party newspaper of Assam "Shadinata" was an ally and always took its stand supporting the cause of the

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<sup>321</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, p. 58. Also in Dev and Lahari, "The Line System of Assam," Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, *op. cit.*

<sup>322</sup> Mohammed Yahya Tamizi, Sufi Movements in Eastern India, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>323</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

Bengali migrant peasants and blamed the peasant's problem on the bureaucracy and the "vested interest" groups.<sup>324</sup>

Bhasani's struggle in Assam shows that his involvement with the Muslim League was not a simple means for getting vote. Bhasani's pro peasant politics is evident in his activities. For him to be in the Congress Party it was not possible to fight against the *zamindars* who were also the leaders in the Congress Party.<sup>325</sup>

Mawlana Bhasani's struggle in Assam is an important period of his political career. Maksud sees a parallel between Bhasani's struggle to establish the rights of the destitute peasants in Assam against xenophobia, destruction of peasant's property, and violation of their rights with Gandhi's struggle against the racial policy of the South African government against the South Asians. In both cases the helpless people needed strong leaders.<sup>326</sup> Both used their religious spirituality to fight against oppressive government. Bhasani's sacrifice and devotion to help the poor peasants made him a legend in Assam. According to Dev it made him as "one of the greatest leaders Assam has ever produced."<sup>327</sup>

In Assam, Bhasani was the head of the Muslim League. He was also a practicing Muslim. In his speech he used Islamic vocabulary to justify his actions. His sermon style speech, his Muslim dress, his later stand to include Assam with Pakistan, his opposition to the cow slaughter policy by the *zaminder* are all surface indications that his ideas were that of "fanatic" Muslim. But was he truly a "fanatic Muslim"? His preference for

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<sup>324</sup> The Shadinata, 2nd April, 1947. Also in Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>327</sup> Dev and Larhari, op. cit. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 35.

justice than party politics shows that even as the President of the Assam Muslim League, he opposed Sadullah, the Muslim League premier of Assam, an indication that his use of religion in politics was a matter of personal integrity of his religious convictions.

There is no doubt that his religious outlook remained Islamic, but it seems that it was of a different kind. He believed that “land belongs to God, or *Rabb*”, the Lord of humanity and that the uprooted Bengali peasants have the right to settle in uninhabited Assamese forests. Further, it is to note that despite the religious nature of his approach, Bhasani appreciated even *zamindars* who promoted welfare through philanthropic activities. Abdus Satter records Bhasani’s encounter with a Hindu *zaminder* in 1946.

Bhasani was invited to visit Gopesh Babu, the *zamindar* of Kauguri. The *zamindar* was a famous philanthropist. During the discussion it was time for *Magrib* prayer (evening prayer). Bhasani wanted to leave and said “I will come back later.” Gopesh Babu said with smile “Would the prayer be ok in a Hindu house?” Bhasani smiled and replied with a preferred Sufi interfaith phrase: “If God is everywhere, he must be present in a Hindu house also.” In the Quran it says Allah is present everywhere. Gopesh Babu was shocked. “*Hujur*, if there were more leaders like you, there would not be anymore communal violence.”<sup>328</sup> Bhasani’s belief in *Sharia* and his personal duty to pray to God but his noncommunal idea to pray in the house of a non Muslim seen as a fellow human being is an expression of Bhasani’s *rubūbiyah* ideas.

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<sup>328</sup> Abdus Satter, “Mawlana Bhasani O Ami” (Mawlana Bhasani and Me) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu’m Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani). op. cit., pp. 82-83. (Emphasis added)

## CHAPTER 5: BHASANI'S VISION AND LEADERSHIP IN PAKISTAN (1947-1971)

In 1947 India and Pakistan were carved out of British India. Pakistan became an independent country on the basis of its Muslim majority regions in British India. Pakistan had two parts- East Pakistan on the Eastern part of the subcontinent and West Pakistan on the West. Between the two provinces lie more than 900 miles of Indian territory.<sup>329</sup> After independence, Pakistan became a unitary system of government. The majority of the population 54.6 lived in East Pakistan and 46.4 % lived in West Pakistan. West Pakistan was physically larger than East Pakistan.<sup>330</sup>

Bhasani was in jail in Assam when India and Pakistan became two independent countries. In September of the same year he was escorted by the Indian army to the Assam border with Pakistan and ordered to leave.<sup>331</sup>

It is true that Bhasani's political career began in Assam, but the climax of his leadership was after Pakistan gained independence. His work in Pakistan left a legacy of a leader who is both admired and detested for his style of leadership. During this period, he was criticized as a "Communist", or "a puppet of the Communist", or an "Indian agent" and even "a *lungi* only Mawlana," implying that he did not have any direction in

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<sup>329</sup> New Standard Encyclopedia, vol. 10, (Chicago: Standard Education Society, Inc., 1967) pp. 40-41.

<sup>330</sup> According to the Census the distribution of various language groups of Pakistan was as follows:

Language group	Percentage to the total population
Bengali	54.6
Punjabi	28.4
Pushtu	7.1
Urdu	7.2
Sindhi	5.8
English	1.8

Source: L. M. Singh (ed.) Bangladesh Background and Perspective (New Delhi: The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies, 1971) pp. 132-133.

politics. The question is who was he? Why was he so controversial? In order to know how Bhasani drew upon, his *rubúbiyah* ideas during Pakistani period, we will first re-examine the context of Pakistan and then review the use of his religious perspectives in his activities during this period.

**Table 4: Showing the chronology of important events**

1946	Jinnah convened the Delhi Conference for a Pakistan with a unitary system of government.
August 14, 1947	Pakistan's independence. Bhasani was in jail in Assam. He was released in September 1947 and forced to return to East Pakistan.
March 24, 1948	Jinnah came to visit Dhaka after independence.
June 3, 1948	Bhasani opposed Jinnah's imposition of Urdu as the only language of Pakistan. He demanded autonomy based on the 1940 Lahore conference. Tamuzzun Majlis, a literary organization arrived from Calcutta demanded Bengali to be one of the the state languages of Pakistan.
1948	Jinnah the Governor General died in 1948 and Liaquat Ali became the prime minister.  Bhasani was elected as a Muslim League candidate to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly from South Tangail.
March 17 <sup>th</sup> , 1948	He bitterly criticized the central government in the Legislative Assembly. He went on to form the East Pakistan Islam Mission and resigned from the Assembly in protest.
March 1949	Went to Dubri, Assam. Was arrested on March 17 and released in the third week of May and returned to East Pakistan.
June 23, 1949	Formed the first opposition party, East Pakistan Awami Muslim League. He became the President.
June 24, 1949	First meeting of the Awami Muslim League at Armanitola grounds in Dhaka.
June 1949	Founded the weekly newspaper <i>Ittifaq</i> .
October 13, 1949	Arrested under special powers act.
December 10, 1950	Released from jail after fasting at the central jail to protest the secret killing of Communists in Rajshahi jail. Communists merged with Bhasani for tactical purposes. Bhasani's call found heed among the students,

<sup>331</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 63.

	peasants, and workers.
December 24, 1950	Huge public meeting at Dhaka Armanitola grounds where non confidence proposal against Liaquat Ali Khan was adopted.
October 16, 1951	Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated and Khaja Najimuddin Khan became the Prime Minister of Pakistan.
January 31, 1952	All Party state language movement Association was formed.
February 21, 1952	Police fire on student demonstration in front of the Medical hall.
February 22, 1952	Led the <i>gaibee</i> (absent) prayer as the <i>imam</i> in front of the Medical Hostel.
April 10, 1952	Arrested in connection with his language movement involvement.
April 18, 1953	Became ill and admitted into hospital.
November 14-15, 1953	First Awami Muslim League council session held.
December 4, 1953	United Front was formed with Bengali political Parties.
March 8, 1954	United Front won the election.
May 25, 1954	Represented East Pakistan at the World Peace Council in Berlin at the invitation of the President of the council, Julio Kuri.
November 1954	Joined the World Peace Council in Stockholm.
1954	Self-exile in Europe. From Europe tour went to Calcutta but was unable to enter East Pakistan. Stayed in the tower hotel of Baligonj in Calcutta. The government declared that he would be arrested upon return to East Pakistan.
April 25, 1955	Along with the Law Minister Suhrawardy, Aatur Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returns to East Pakistan.
October 21-23, 1955	At the Awami Muslim League council session the word Muslim was taken off from the name Awami Muslim League and renamed as Awami League.
January 15, 1956	At a meeting at Palton ground he threatened the separation of East Bengal.
February 21, 1956	Laid the foundation stone of the Shahid Minar along with the Chief minister Abul Hossain Sarkar and Barkat's mother (the mother of one of the students who had died in the language movement).
February 29, 1956	Bengali was recognized by the government of Pakistan as an official language along with Urdu.
1957	The Central government was formed with Suhrawardy as the Prime Minister and Aatur Rahman as Chief Minister of East Pakistan.  Historic Kagmari conference was held, where 51 gates were erected. In his speech he said <i>assalamu alaikum</i> to the West Pakistani rulers. Bhasani was harassed by Awami League followers of Suhrawardy.



Bhasani Visited Europe.

While the Awami League and Suhrawardy were in power, Bhasani demanded autonomy and the cancellation of the military pact with America.

In Dhaka's Rup Mahal cinema Bhasani formed the leftist party NAP (National Awami League) which included many Communists.

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| 1958             | General Ayub Khan declared Martial Law in the country and took over power.  |
| 1963             | His first visit to China. He met Mao Tse Tung and his friendship with China increased.  |
| 1965             | Indo-Pakistan war, NAP divides into pro-Russian and Pro-China groups.   |
| 1966             | Sheikh Mujibur Rahman demands six points and Bhasani's reactions to it were positive.   |
| 1968-69          | Mass movement( <i>Gono advouthan</i> ) against Ayub Khan  |
| 1968             | Attended the Havana Peace Conference.   |
| December 6, 1968 | At a meeting in Paltan, Bhasani urged Pakistani rulers to release Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from government's Agartala conspiracy case. |
| 1969             | Historic <i>gharao</i> movement. The Pakshi Conference directed the movement first in rural areas.                                  |
| 1969             | Mass uprising led to the fall of Ayub Khan.   |
| Dec 4, 1970      | Announced the independence of East Pakistan in the Darbar Hall at Santosh in East Pakistan.   |
| April 16, 1971   | Left for India to help the independence movement. He remained under house arrest in India due to his outspokenness.                 |

Source: Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, (Bengali), (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994); Also Hasan Abdul Quayyum,(ed.) Majlu'm Jonaneta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), (in Bengali), (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1988).

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### The Emerging Scene

Bhasani's role in Pakistani politics can not be understood without first understanding Pakistan especially in its inception. Therefore, it is important to provide a background to the politics of Pakistan at its inception.

During the 1930's, after the failure of the *Khilafat* movement, and the death of C. R. Das, Bhasani like many Muslim leaders, eventually left the Congress Party and joined

the Muslim League. Bhasani always believed in the cultural diversity of nations.<sup>332</sup> On this issue during the 1940's he agreed with Muslim leaders demand to the Congress Party to give autonomy to Muslim majority provinces. One such demand for autonomy was for Bengal and for the other cluster of provinces in the western region of India. This framework for change to form at least two autonomous states within India was promoted for six years. This is commonly known as the Lahore resolution of 1940. As the President of the Assam Muslim League, Bhasani was present in the meeting that adopted the Lahore resolution.<sup>333</sup> However, the Congress rejection of the Muslim demand for autonomy for Bengal, Punjab and other Muslim majority states in India led Jinnah to demand an independent country.<sup>334</sup> Hasan N. Gardezi says:

In fact, it was the realization of being an underprivileged socioeconomic community that made the Muslims of the subcontinent rally behind the demand for an independent homeland, seperated from India. ...The founder of the Muslim League, as well as many workers in the movement, portrayed the struggle for independence from colonial rule as freedom from exploitation by the big-city financial and capitalist interests.<sup>335</sup>

On the basis of the framework laid out in the Lahore resolution, in 1946 under Jinnah's leadership Muslim candidates participated in a general election in India. After the election, in the same year however, Jinnah convened a conference in Delhi. At this conference Jinnah cleverly removed the word states from the previous Lahore resolution and instead called the whole of the Muslim majority zones, a state, i.e. a Pakistan zone. The "Delhi resolution" as it is known, did not recognize it as a fundamental change but

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<sup>332</sup> Bhasani, *Rububiater Bhumika (The Role of Rububiyah)* op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>333</sup> Bipul Ranjan Nath. *Praschater Rajnaitik Chintadhara, (The Thought Process of the Politicians of the East)* (Dhaka: Book Society, 1994), p. 309. Also see Maksud, *Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>334</sup> Bahar, A.S. "Partition of Indian Subcontinent in 1947: Its Relevance to Canada and Quebec." *East West Dialogue*, Vol 1, No. 2, Montreal, 1997.

<sup>335</sup> Hasan N. Gardezi, "Neocolonial Alliance" in Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism in South Asia*, (New York: Monthly Review press, 1973), p. 137.

conceded it as a typing error that had been corrected. In the definition of Muslim majority areas now called Pakistan turned into an unitary system. To Bhasani, it was but a betrayal by Jinnah of the cause of Bengali's demand for autonomy in the Lahore resolution. From Assam Bhasani protested vehemently against the Delhi resolution.<sup>336</sup>

Many of the above decisions were taken by Jinnah with the help of Muslim League leader Suhrawardy, the Premier of Bengal. However, immediately after the Delhi resolution was adopted, Suhrawardy fell out of favour with Jinnah and was out of luck in Jinnah's first Pakistan cabinet. Bhasani, along with Abul Hashem, A. K. Fazlul Haq and most other important Bengali leaders, who had objected to the Delhi amendment, were excluded in the decision making on other crucial issues, such as drawing the partition of Bengal at that time. Instead of any prominent Bengali leader, a Muslim lawyer from Hyderabad of central India was appointed by the Muslim League central command to represent Muslim League draw the partition of East Pakistan with India.

The outcome of such neglect in this crucial movement of Partition and its outcome led to what A. K. Fazlul Haq called a "moth eaten" Pakistan. While the major part of Bengal came with East Pakistan, the two major Bengali capitals, Calcutta, and Murshidabad one with its commercial and administrative and the other one with administrative infracture were excluded from East Pakistan despite the latter's majority

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<sup>336</sup> Bipul Ranjan Nath, *Praschater Rajnaitik Chintadhara*, (The Thought Process of the Politicians of the East), op. cit., p.309. Also see, K. K. Aziz, *History of Partition of India*, (2nd volume), (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1988), pp. 655-56, 669. Also see Maksud, *Bhasani*, p. 91. At the Delhi conference of 1946 convened by Jinnah, Lahore resolution's demand for autonomous states turned to a future Pakistan with a unitary system. Bhasani stood against the new proposal and raised concerns about the viability of Pakistan as a state. His protest went unheard. He reluctantly accepted the Muslim League demand for Pakistan, perhaps for the time being. His concern for peasants, and Bengal's strong cultural differences with non Bengalis was a voice in the wilderness to the central Muslim League leaders like Jinnah who

vote to join East Pakistan. East Pakistan emerged as a rural hinterland with a mostly peasant population. It has come into existence with three sides of its borders with India and was deprived of its border with China, Nepal and Bhutan in the North.

Other members of the important Bengali intelligentsia from Calcutta, especially the members of the Majlis who were very much in favour of keeping Bengali language as one of the state languages of Pakistan were also excluded. For a time it looked as if the political career of all these abandoned Bengali Muslim Leaguers in Calcutta were over. Many of these Bengali intellectuals, even realizing the grim situation of their political career remained in Calcutta, but the Hindu fundamentalist threat persuaded them to return to "Jinnah's Pakistan."<sup>337</sup> Jinnah, the new Governor General of Pakistan also chose Karachi, located in the Western wing as the new capital of the country.

As will be seen, throughout his lifetime, Bhasani could never forget the "betrayal" of losing the identity of Bengal in Jinnah's envisioned Pakistan. All through his struggle in the Pakistan period he brought up the Lahore proposal in which he had demanded the full autonomy of Bengal.<sup>338</sup>

Hasan N. Gardezi says: "For sometime after the creation of Pakistan, those who succeeded the British rulers continued the rhetoric of freedom, equality, and prosperity for all."<sup>339</sup> Indeed, Jinnah said "If Pakistan means Pakistan of the landlords and capitalists

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were caught up with negotiations with the Congress and demanded strong show of loyalty from its party members.

<sup>337</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochar (50 years of Politics as I observed it) op. cit., pp. 202-234.

<sup>338</sup> Bhasani, Rabubiater Bumika (The Role of Rabubiat), op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>339</sup> Hasan N. Gardezi, "Neocolonial Alliance" in Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma eds. Imperialism in South Asia, op. cit., p. 137.

I would not have it.”<sup>340</sup> Hasan N. Gardezi says: “However, ... they are incapable of grasping the significance of the people’s participation in politics and nation building.”<sup>341</sup>

Matters were further complicated when an Urdu speaking, non- Bengali Muslim League leader, Khaja Nazimuddin, the Nawab of Dhaka was made the first chief Minister -designate of East Pakistan. Khaja Nazimuddin was also Suhrawardy’s erstwhile rival. Suhrawardy himself an Urdu speaking person from Calcutta, but unlike Nazimuddin he had good grass- root Bengali contacts. Thus, the Muslim League government of East Pakistan, as well as of West Pakistan were chosen by Jinnah and he excluded leading Bengali Muslims. The new leadership was mainly comprised of members of the non-Bengali, aristocratic class of Urdu speaking landowners and the rising commercial class, either from the Western wing or from the Indian Muslim immigrants in Pakistan. At this time Jinnah’s concern for All India Muslim League interest and because of his tight bargaining position with the Congress Party required him to seek for strong Muslim League supporters with him. In many respects Jinnah was a great politician of the subcontinent but under the circumstances he could concentrate little about the unfamiliar Bengali political dynamics which did not help in the long run.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Shahed Ali, “Mawlana Bhasanir Shaniddhe”(In the Presence of the Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu’ m Jononeta, Mawlana Bhasani*, (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>341</sup> Hasan N. Gardezi, “Neocolonial Alliance” in Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism in South Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>342</sup> For Pakistan it was a “Rougher time getting started.” See for more details this site: <<http://www.xenohistorian.faithweb.com/india/in06c.html>> The author’s name is not mentioned says: “There were eight million refugees to absorb, and the 1947 partition left India with most of the industry, cities, and skilled workers; in addition, the death of Jinnah left Pakistan in the hands of far less capable leadership than India had at the time. In the decade after Jinnah, six prime ministers held office. Because Pakistan was conceived as an Islamic state, Islamic fundamentalists have tried to give Pakistan a government that strictly follows the Koran. The need to balance the wishes of fundamentalists and modernists, Urdu-speaking West Pakistan and Bengali-speaking East Pakistan, and many other factors has caused the constitution to be

During the British rule, as one may recall, most of the feudal lords in Bengal were Hindus. Now the Hindu *zamindars* were replaced by leaders from West Pakistan or Indian Muslims or their Urdu speaking allies from East Pakistan. Many political observers did not understand why Jinnah excluded the Bengali intelligentsias (in the Bengali majority Pakistan) almost completely both in the Central Government as well as in the provincial government in East Pakistan. Although as a Muslim League politician Bhasani was supposed to be an ally of the Central Muslim League leaders, he saw in the new structure a repetition of the pattern of aristocratic Hindu leadership of the Congress except that this time the new ruling class was composed of Urdu speaking Muslims.<sup>343</sup> Bhasani was always with the underdogs to champion their rights and he had no problem identifying his foes and friends in the newly formed Pakistan. He found that the Central government deprived Bengalis their rights and their voice.

After the independence of Pakistan, the whole Bengali intelligentsia from Calcutta and Assam, including A. K. Fazlul Haq, Suhrawardy, and the Majlis group, was back with Bhasani in Dhaka, the capital of East Pakistan.<sup>344</sup> They were quiet for few months; the calm before the storm!

In section 1 of Chapter 5 Bhasani's political leadership will be studied along with his founding of Awami Muslim League Party. In section 2, his leadership will be examined in reflection to the NAP (National Awami Party).

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rewritten more than once. Altogether it is remarkable that Pakistan survived the first generation of its existence."

<sup>343</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmed, Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochar (Fifty Years of Politics as I Observed it), op. cit., pp. 220-221.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., pp. 224-234.

## SECTION 1: BHASANI WITH AWAMI MUSLIM LEAGUE PARTY

### Bhasani's brief constitutional Politics

In February of 1948 Bhasani was elected in South Tangail as a Muslim League candidate to the East Pakistan legislative assembly. In the same year he formed the Islam Mission (not a political party) which had the *rubûbiyah* philosophy as its program.<sup>345</sup> Bhasani, following his idea of *rubûbiyah*, found justifications for the linguistic rights of people. In the Legislative Assembly Bhasani said:

Those people who were present were mostly Bengalis but most speakers spoke in English. Most of you here will agree with me that this is a Bengali country. .. I request, honourable speaker, that you give a ruling that ...we speak in Bengali. I request that you (the speaker) also speak in Bengali.<sup>346</sup>

One would recall Bhasani fought for the rights of Bengalis' linguistic rights in the Assam parliament; he continued it in East Pakistan. When debating the budget, he also criticized the Central government bitterly.

On March 24, 1948, eight months after the independence of Pakistan, Jinnah came to visit Dhaka.<sup>347</sup> It was only six months before his death. He died on September 11, 1948. The Bengali intelligentsia from Calcutta was unhappy at Jinnah's failure to obtain Calcutta and a greater part of Assam. In Dhaka he was received with great enthusiasm by mostly the non-Bengali speaking intelligentsia. During this visit, he announced something that pleased the non- Bengalis that only "Urdu would be the official language of Pakistan."<sup>348</sup> Interestingly, Jinnah's first language was not Urdu. The

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<sup>345</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

<sup>346</sup> East Bengal legislative Assembly Documents, p. 72-75; Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>347</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochar (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed it). op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

contradiction was that the language of the majority of Pakistanis is Bengali. However, at this time of his life with his deteriorating health he was dealing with a problem he could hardly handle. There were not much help from his inept associates. Jinnah's announcement about Urdu language created uproar all over East Pakistan. The language issue was taken over by the Congress party of Pakistan, led mostly by Hindus of Bengal and the Majlis group.<sup>349</sup> Bhasani felt it unfair that the Bengali majority were obliged to speak in a minority language.

Bhasani questioned such measures by the Central government without its consultation of the populace. He questioned: "Are we the slaves of the Central government? We refuse to be the slaves of the British government. We fought all our lives for the establishment of justice. We are ready to do it again."<sup>350</sup> Bhasani also questioned the economic aspects dealing with the provinces:

We grow jute with hard work; we pay jute tax, railway tax, income tax, and sales tax to the Central government. I do not say we should not pay tax to the Central government. I say that the provinces should keep 75% of it and the rest should go to the central government.<sup>351</sup>

During this long speech Bhasani also said:

The Honourable finance minister said recently, 'if the *zamindari* system is quickly dissolved one *crore* people will die or their life would be at risk'. The number you presented did not make sense to me. In East Bengal 95% people are peasants. How can one crore people die if the *zamindari* system is made defunct. How did you invent it? ... Nobody has the right to become a government minister and make people suffer. Today, we are no longer a British colony. In independent Pakistan every citizen has equal right, every individual wants food, medical care, housing, good communication, educational opportunities. These are their genuine

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>350</sup> Bangladesh Government, Ministry of Information, East Bengal Legislative Assembly, pp. 72-75.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.



rights. I believe that the ministers will be more popular by dissolving the *zamindari* system<sup>352</sup>

Bhasani was fighting against the discriminatory policy of the central government and demanding both the cultural and economic rights of the Bengalis as Pakistanis. Throughout his life, Bhasani fought against exploitation and against the *zamindari* system. It seems on behalf of the peasants he continued his fight, he thought peasants were already very poor, and pays too much in taxes to the Central government.

Maksud estimates that in the newly independent Pakistan Legislative Assembly, the presence of Bhasani as a Muslim League leader was seen as a danger and it became a concern to the ruling circle. The ruling circle wanted loyalty from its members. They invented a claim of election fraud in Bhasani's constituency saying that his seat should be cancelled. He was also being harassed through disinformation. Bhasani sensed that the government was plotting against him. He voluntarily resigned from his seat.<sup>353</sup> He sent his resignation letter to the government in which he reveals interesting clues to his Islamic vision. He said:

In February of 1948, after getting the Muslim League nomination, I was elected in south Tangail. I was elected...to serve the Hindu -Muslim population of East Pakistan and especially the poor peasants who, after working all day can not even have a full stomach of food, can not even have a piece of cloth after death. I was elected for the freedom of these helpless have-nots. In the March budget session, despite many obstacles, I submitted their demands. For that reason, I had to face charges in court by *zamindars*, money lenders and smugglers. I became a victim of false propaganda by opportunist politicians.

The demands I have placed did not bring any result. It was like crying in the wilderness. ... To me, without public awareness no country can have real independence.

That is why I am working with the people and dedicating myself to the constructive works of the country and in directing the activities of the Islam

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<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 66.

Mission. Wherever the government will work for the benefit of people, our mission will be to serve for the sake of human benefit. But if there are any anti-people activities the Islam Mission will work hard to fight against them.

After much thinking I have come to realize that neither Communism nor any other ideology -except Islam can save the helpless peasants and the working class. That is why it is my mission to preach the ideals of Islam, and the Quran to the whole world. ...This responsibility is taken by the Islam Mission. With all kinds of help from sympathetic people and leaders, I will lead this mission for Islam. In Islam 14 hundred years ago, the ideals of equality, friendship and peace were advanced. ...That is why I have chosen the path of propagating Islam.<sup>354</sup>

Bhasani's Islam Mission was not a missionary group to convert the non Muslims. Its main objective was to fight for justice and bring equality among people. The Muslim League was also propagating the Muslim/Islamic cause for the "integrity" and "unity" of Pakistan. So within the Muslim League one can see two Islamic models: The Islam of the Urdu speaking ruling class who believe in the integrity of Pakistan and the Islamic life of Bhasani's Bengali peasants that produce jute, the main export item of Pakistan. Bhasani said:

I was elected in the legislative assembly - but the promise I gave to the people is to serve them. I have no intention of working only to be eligible for the regular salary, travelling allowance, etc. By resigning I have decided to devote my time to the work of the Islam Mission. The countrymen should not think that I have stopped serving the country. On the other hand, I have chosen the real path to serve the country. ...don't invite me only to give speeches, but call me to help in the constructive work of the nation.<sup>355</sup>

In the meantime, an order from the Provincial governor restricted Bhasani legally from participating in the future election until 1950.<sup>356</sup> Muslim League membership in Bengal was tightly controlled and restricted by the ruling class.<sup>357</sup> Those who opposed

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<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>355</sup> *Weekly Sainik*, 10 December, 1948. Also see Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>356</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

the Muslim League, the only party in the country, were harassed. Samsul Haq, an associate of Bhasani who ran for election in Tangail and won, was also harassed. Due to the Muslim League policy, lower level leaders and workers of the Muslim League started to lose trust in the Muslim League because of its involvement in "dirty politics."<sup>358</sup>

During the Assam period as well the early Pakistan period, we have seen that Bhasani was willing to participate in the electoral process and to run for office himself. However, after the above incidents and witnessing the pretentiousness of the Muslim League politics, he lost trust in elected governments. As a result, he never contested in the National Assembly. In 1949, frustrated with "the politics of conspiracy," Bhasani left East Pakistan for Dubri in Assam to live with his followers. Bhasani was arrested on the 17th of March, 1949 by the Indian Assam government, on charges of anti-state activities.

The Weekly Sainik reported:

...Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan (Bashan's Mawlana MLA) was arrested by the Assam government and sent to jail. The allegations were that he was involved in anti state activities. The news of Bhasani's arrest led to big protests throughout Assam. On the 21st of March several groups condemned the arrest. In the same year he was expelled from Assam by the government. He returned to Santosh in Tangail with some of his retinue of Sufi followers who had been scattered throughout rural Bengal.<sup>359</sup>

At this point in 1949, finally, Bhasani realized that his permanent home should be in East Pakistan and no where else. He would struggle to bring changes in Pakistan. Maksud reports: "After Bhasani returned from Assam, he decided that he would formally resign from the Muslim League Party. For that matter he toured the whole country to gain support from the people against the Muslim League."<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-69.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

On June 15, Bhasani released a statement which declared that Muslim League member's convention would be held on June 23-24 and said:

As the Muslim League is no longer a people- oriented organization, we can not help the government of East Pakistan to do any welfare work. Because of the unqualified leaders of the League, there has been anarchy and corruption in the country. ... With an aim to help the nation and to save country from opportunist leaders we have called for a Muslim League member's convention.<sup>361</sup>

He felt the Muslim League Party was no longer a people oriented party and he found its leaders as opportunists. On the afternoon of June 23, the rebel group of the Muslim League workers met in Rose garden in Dhaka, with Bhasani as the chief guest. According to Maksud, Bhasani had secret information through Mostaque Ahmad [an associate of Bhasani] that the government had planned to arrest him in order to stop him from joining the convention. However, Bhasani disguised himself, covering him face with a *shawl* and arrived secretly in a horse driven cart.<sup>362</sup> His presence was enough to attract sufficient amount of people to the convention. Despite threats there were "approximately 300 people" attended the conference.<sup>363</sup>

#### The Formation of the Awami Muslim League

On 23rd of June, a new opposition party, the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (People's Muslim League) was formed.<sup>364</sup> Bhasani was chosen as the President of the party. The General Secretary was Shamsul Haq, a follower of the Bhasani's vision of

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<sup>361</sup> Badruddin Omar, Purba Banglar Basha Andoloon O' Totkalin Rajniti (The Language Movement of East Bengal and the Contemporary Politics) (Dhaka, 1970) (Bengali), p. 232. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>362</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

*rubúbiyah*. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,<sup>365</sup> one of the important future leaders of Bangladesh, was made the joint secretary of the party even though he was in jail when the party was formed.<sup>366</sup>

Shamsul Haq, the new secretary of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, in connection with the convention published a pamphlet titled, "the Main Demands" which also shows Bhasani's vision. He wrote:

The East Pakistan Muslim League member's Convention believes that, like all the events of every century, of every country, Lahore resolution has also made a history. ... But even though Pakistan is an Islamic state, it is not a Muslim state, or a state meant only for Muslims nor does it wish to be influenced by the Anti-Islamic imperialist, Capitalist nor by self-centred environment. In the Islamic point of view, *Allah* is not only for Muslims but He is the God of the entire humanity- irrespective of nation, religion, and colour. *Rabb* is Allah's greatest identity. And as *Rabb* the *Rububiyat* (sic) or lordship is our first and the most important duty...<sup>367</sup>

The Awami Muslim Muslim League's main document said that it had no fundamental difference with the Muslim League except that Awami Muslim League is built on the basis of genuine Islamic principles. The *jihad* of this party is to fight against "oppressive and exploitative leaders."<sup>368</sup> It is interesting to observe that Bhasani was ready in East Bengal to apply his *rubúbiyah* principles to replace the *za'lims*. In Pakistan his *jihad* was to establish justice in society, although in this case it was against the guardians of the Muslim state.

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<sup>365</sup> During Pakistan period Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was commonly known among Bengalis as Mujib. During the Mass uprising (on 23 February, 1979) for his patriotic fight against the Pakistani rulers for Bengali people's rights, his deputy Tofail Ahamed gave him the title "Bangabandu" meaning 'Friend of Bengal.' For details see Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

<sup>366</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 70. (Emphasis added).

<sup>367</sup> Shamsul Haq in Maksud, Abdul Hamd Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

On the 24th of December, the first meeting of the Awami League took place on Armanitola grounds under Bhasani's leadership. Before the meeting started, the stage was ransacked by Muslim League goons. In protest against this unlawful vengeance, the young members carried on with the meeting. "Approximately five thousand" people participated in the meeting which was quite significant for a new party. They carried Bhasani on their shoulder to the stage. The speakers "gave fiery speeches" and urged people to abandon the Muslim League and join the Awami Muslim League.<sup>369</sup>

The establishment of the opposition party by Mawlana Bhasani in East Pakistan led to the beginning of a new era in Pakistan politics. In order to increase the popularity of the Awami League, Bhasani toured East Bengal with Shamsul Haq and others. On the 25th of August there was a conference of Awami Muslim League party workers.<sup>370</sup>

Mawlana Bhasani said in his speech:

If the real Islam was explained to the Hindu brethren, then they would not be afraid of the Islamic system. As opposed to this oppressive Islam, only with a true Islamic system can we bring world peace.<sup>371</sup>

The above reference indicates that Bhasani saw his understanding of Islam different from normative Islam or the Islam of the Muslim League. The latter was communal minded and Bhasani's was about oneness of God, the unity of beings and God's lordship. The implication is that Bhasani's true Islam will help him to work with the Hindus. Bhasani's concern was that the Muslim League was political minded and their form of Islam created distance between citizens on the question of religion. In this

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Weekly Sainik, 16 September, 1949.

sense his interpretation of Islam allowed him to share space in a religiously multi ethnic society, a characteristic of Bhasani's modernist interpretation of Islam.<sup>372</sup>

#### The founding of the Weekly *Ittifaq*

In the days following the founding of Pakistan, most newspapers were pro-Muslim League. There was no newspaper to represent the Awami Muslim League's side of the story. In July 1949, Bhasani founded the first pro-Awami Muslim League newspaper, *Ittifaq*. At an informal meeting in the Dhaka Bar Library, he announced the founding of the *Ittifaq* newspaper. The name *Ittifaq* proposed by Bhasani means "agreement," or "concord," that there is agreement among the the new Awami Muslim League members to fight against the Muslim League's policies.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> 1949, the first issue of *Ittifaq* was off the press. Bhasani served as the original editor. Later he asked his associate Taffazal Hossain Manik Mia as the editor to replace him. Soon *Ittifaq* became the most popular newspaper in East Pakistan.<sup>373</sup>

Until this time, Bengalis under the leadership of Bhasani built the necessary institutions (a political Party and a newspaper) to serve as base from which to launch their demands to the Central government. On October 11, 1949, a meeting was organized by the Awami Muslim League. A resolution was passed demanding the resignation of the Nurul Amin government on ground that it failed to solve the food problem. Bhasani urged the ravenous people to break the law. After the meeting, Bhasani led a procession violating section 144 of the law which bans procession. In the clash between the police and the Awami League, it was reported that approximately 20 people were injured. On

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<sup>372</sup> Abid S. Bahar, "Bhasani's Sufi perspective on Islamic living," A paper Presented at the Eighth Annual Graduate Student Interdisciplinary Conference 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2003 Concordia University, Montreal, at the conference on Sharing Space: Particularity within Diversity.

October 13<sup>th</sup>, the Police arrested Bhasani from the residence of Ear Mohammed (an associate of Bhasani).<sup>374</sup> In this encounter with the government Bhasani acted as if like the Prophet's companion Abu Dhar who protested against the powerful co religionist Mu'a'wiyah outside his palace for which he was ruthlessly punished. This was Bhasani's first arrest since the independence of Pakistan.

### In Jail with the Communists

Bhasani's Islamic vision dictated that he appreciate and work with those who fought selflessly for the masses, but he was not a Communist himself. It should be noted however, that this was not Bhasani's first encounter with the Communists.<sup>375</sup> In 1925 at the All India Communist conference, Bhasani was present as an observer.<sup>376</sup> During his days in Assam, he also had support of the Communists for his struggle against the line system.<sup>377</sup>

Despite his prior knowledge of Communist ideology, Maksud says that in jail Bhasani came in direct contact with the Communists for the first time. At that time, in addition to this, on charges relating to public safety, the government of Pakistan arrested approximately 3000 Communists.<sup>378</sup> Haji Danesh a veteran Communist was one of them. He describes his first encounter with Bhasani:

In 1950, Mawlana Bhasani and I used to live in the same building. He was on the second floor and I was on the ground floor, but I had the chance to meet him often. And we had discussions on many different topics. At the time he was the

<sup>373</sup> Maksud, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> For a history of the Communist movements in India see: <<http://www.maoism.org/misc/india/india.htm>> July 6, 2003.

<sup>376</sup> Janatar Chabuk Mawlana Bhasani (Mawlana Bhasani, the Whip of the Masses) (author not mentioned), Souvenir, 1980. p. 33.

<sup>377</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p. 75.



president of Awami Muslim League. He was jailed on charges of breaking the 144 rule. I was secretly a member of the Communist party but outside, I was a member of a democratic party. Before this I had heard many stories about him but this was the first time I had a chance to meet him.<sup>379</sup>

Danesh says:

After the first encounter, our relationship deepened. I slowly realized that even though he was the president of the Awami Muslim League, he still was sympathetic to the Communists. Slowly our discussions continued on topics regarding how to bring change to the fate of the poor peasants.<sup>380</sup>

Bhasani's concerns to improve the conditions of the poor had similarities with the Communists. During this time there had been many Hindu- Muslim communal riots. Many well to do Hindus were also arrested on grounds of state security. When Bhasani came to know about the torture of the Hindu prisoners, he became very concerned. He showed his dismay by saying: "If I was outside the jail, I could have tried to stop it. See what type of Islam they are propagating. To them, when you kill a Hindu you go to heaven."<sup>381</sup>

At this time, there was a communal riot in the Rajshahi jail and many Communist party members were killed. Danesh wrote about Bhasani's reaction to this:

He looked very sad and restless. He told me what he had heard and said, "Haji Shaheb, when will this injustice and oppression end?" I still remember clearly that he was so upset that he did not eat a bit of food that day.<sup>382</sup>

He was distressed at this and subsequently, in protest against the government's oppression, he started fasting in Jail. Demands for the release of Bhasani intensified and

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<sup>379</sup> Haji Danish is quoted in Shahriar Kabir's Mawlana Bhasani: Political life and his Struggle, (Dhaka, 1978). Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>382</sup> The Daily Insaf, 13 October, 1950. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 75.

on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1950 Bhasani was released from jail. Afterwards he gave an interview to the Weekly *Sainik*. He said:

In the name of protecting Islam, the oppressive regime of Pakistan is paving the way for Communism to grow. For the vested interests they are causing people to detaste Islam and thus they are indirectly helping the Communists.<sup>383</sup>

It seems that although he could work with the Communists for their progressive policies, Bhasani continued to show his strong commitment to his type of *Sufi* Islam of the masses, a contrast to the feudal “populist Islam” of the Pakistani rulers.

Bhasani was opposed to American imperialism in Pakistan as well. Feroz Ahmad wrote that mainly starting in 1951 the Pakistani rulers began to receive economic assistance, in the form of aid from the USA.

By 1954, Pakistan was firmly in the orbit of the United States, signed a mutual security treaty and joining the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). In 1955, it also became a member of another American Pact, the Bagdad Pact (later renamed the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO with Iran, Turkey and Iraq and its allies. American military aid began rolling into Pakistan, amounting to \$1.52 billion in 1969.<sup>384</sup>

Also as part of its obligation to the USA, the Pakistan government allowed America to build a military base near Peshawar and to use its civilian airfields for espionage flights. Pakistan’s leaders repeatedly assured the USA of their complete allegiance.

Bhasani’s pro-peasant and pro-people principles led him to oppose both the Pakistani rulers and their ally America. On December 24th, 1950, at a meeting organized

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<sup>383</sup> *Weekly Sainik*, 19 November, 1950.

<sup>384</sup> Figures cited in Mason Dorfman, and Marglin, “Conflict in East Pakistan: Background and Prospects,” *Congressional Record*, April 7, 1971. Also quoted in Feroz Ahmad, “Structural

by the Awami Muslim League, Bhasani gave a speech which shows his concern for Pakistan as a dependent country. The Weekly Sainik reported:

Mr. Liaket Ali Khan, by mingling Pakistan with American imperialism is bringing about the end of Pakistan. Bhasani condemned Pakistan's support of America's Korean War. He said Liaket had become an American puppet. Let Liaket Ali know that we should be delivered our rightful demands. We do not want mercy, we do not want alms.<sup>385</sup>

At the meeting, besides condemning Pakistan for becoming too dependent on the USA, other proposals were adopted about the regional autonomy including the Bengali language to be recognized as a state language.<sup>386</sup> In 1951, the "wily Bhasani" felt it a responsibility to tour the whole of rural Bengal and explained the activities of the ruling Muslim League. With him were his two other colleagues: Shamsul Haq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. With their hard work the Awami Muslim League became a well organized and a strong opposition party in East Pakistan.<sup>387</sup>

From Bhasani's speeches and activities one may observe an additional tendency in Bhasani's political demands that, seeing Pakistani ruler's pro-Urdu speaking mentality, the lack of Bengalis in government and Pakistani ruler's general tendency of drifting towards American influence and dependency, he was moving more and more on the road to favouring the demands for the autonomy of East Pakistan more forcefully than ever before.

#### Bhasani and the Language Movement

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Matrix of the Struggle," in Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (eds.) Imperialism in South Asia, op. cit., p. 445.

<sup>385</sup> Weekly Sainik, 25 March, 1949.

<sup>386</sup> The Daily Insaaf, 19th July 1951. Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>387</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 83.

It is important to note that one of the most crucial concerns for Bengalis was the language issue. When the discussions about the partition of the subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan were occurring, an advanced group of Bengali intelligentsia called the Renaissance society, with its base in Calcutta (comprised of Hindus and Muslims alike) demanded that Bengali be the state language of East Pakistan.<sup>388</sup> Tamuzzun Majlis, another group also arrived from Calcutta demanded Bengali be a state language as did *Bangiya Muslim Sahiatya Samity*, a literary organization in 1948.<sup>389</sup>

Bengali was a well developed language and was spoken by 54% of the population of Pakistan. After the independence of Pakistan, the Urdu speaking elite denied the demands of the above groups; on ground that Bengali is the “language of the Hindus.” They declared Urdu the state language of Pakistan and the stage was set for the drama of the language movement. Bhasani already had fought for the language rights of Bengalis in Assam and predictably he took a deep interest in the language movement in East Pakistan as well.

It began with students demanding the Bengali people’s language rights when in 1948 “ Pakistan government’s new currency, money order form, envelope and post cards were all printed in Urdu. Bengali was either absent or insignificant. The policy appeared undemocratic and unacceptable to East Pakistanis. In protest, some students from Dhaka University organized a procession in Dhaka. This created uproar all over East Bengal.”<sup>390</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad says:

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<sup>388</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor, (Fifty Years of Politics as I Observed It), op. cit., p. 242.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 85.

Essentially, the creators of Pakistan while wanting to create Pakistan wanted to protect Muslims from Hindu domination in India. However, they were now, in the name of Islam, ready to deny the Pakistan's majority population's language and culture which were indigenous to the land.<sup>391</sup>

Liaket Ali, the Prime Minister of Pakistan said about Bengali concerns, "Your demands can be characterized as nothing but a matter of regionalism." If we encourage them, Pakistan will be destroyed."<sup>392</sup> Maksud says "It was not the regionalism of East Pakistanis, but the colonial mentality of the West Pakistanis that later destroyed Pakistan."<sup>393</sup> By now Bhasani had become deeply involved in this movement.

While tension was flaring up in East Pakistan about Bengali language rights, Liaket Ali was assassinated on October 16, 1951, and Khaja Nazimuddin became the next Prime Minister of Pakistan. After taking charge, he came from Karachi (the new capital) to Dhaka (in East Pakistan) and had a meeting in old Polton ground. He maintained Liaket Ali's policy that only Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan. At this meeting, he verbally attacked Bhasani accusing him of 'spying for India'. He alleged that Bhasani was acting as a spy and cited that in 1951 when he even travelled to India to establish direct contact with the government of India.<sup>394</sup> Bhasani defended himself against these claims, saying that Nazimuddin was upset about the growing popularity of the Awami League. "He is afraid of losing power to Awami Muslim League. I must assure him that the Awami Muslim League is not a power hungry

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<sup>391</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor, (Fifty Years of Politics as I Observed It), op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>392</sup> Dainik Jindigi, 28th November, 1948. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>393</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

party....”<sup>395</sup> It is true that at least Bhasani as the president of Awami Muslim League does not seem to be doing politics to come to power but to serve people.

Bhasani said:

There is a fundamental difference between us and the Muslim League .... Our aim is to establish democracy. And I demand that the government release the prisoners that are being held without trial. We will not accept that the government let people die in jail...<sup>396</sup>

With the language movement gaining momentum; the all party Language movement was formed in the Dhaka Bar Library on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1952. Starting from the 20th of February, government invoked the 144 rule in Dhaka city banning all strikes, processions, and meetings. But on February 21<sup>st</sup> 1952, some students broke the 144 rule and police opened fire on them. About 39 people were killed. During this time, Bhasani was touring the countryside. Hearing the news, he returned to Dhaka and led the prayer for the “*shahid*” (martyred).<sup>397</sup> The term “*shahid*” was intended to represent not only the actions and deaths of the protesters but the movement as a whole as a religious action - - in fact, a kind of *jihad* or just struggle “in the way of God” - - for martyrdom in *jihad* receives much praise in Islam, beginning with the Quran itself which declares that “the martyr slain in the way of God, is not dead, but living.” (2:154). This is, not to say that Bhasani intended to create or lead a religious movement in the ordinary sense, rather, he perceived a coincidence of certain political or human values and Islamic values as he understood them, and thus saw no problem in invoking religious themes. He was no doubt also aware that the idea of martyrdom would be comprehensible and evocative for the people he led.

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> The Weekly Ittifaq, 4 February, 1952. p. 87.

In a statement on the 22 of February he said:

I want to draw the attention of the people. There have been attempts from the interested quarters to make us weak. They have been trying to create divisions between Bengalis, the non-Bengali and the Beharis. (Beharis are Urdu speaking Muslim immigrants from India.) If by mistake, we step in those traps everything will be spoiled. We are all brothers and citizens of this nation. Our struggle is against oppression. This should always and in every aspect be remembered.<sup>398</sup>

Bhasani, it will be observed, was not an ultra nationalist, but believed in the cultural and religious liberties of people. As in his Assam days, during the language movement also he warned people not become oppressors themselves.

After the events of 21<sup>st</sup> February, the government started to arrest people in large numbers who were involved with the language movement. In this mass arrest, not only participants in the language movement were detained, but the Communists and socialists as well. They remained in jail without trial. During this time, first Bhasani remained at large, but later on he went voluntarily to the District Commissioner to surrender. In jail, Bhasani demanded the release of the prisoners.<sup>399</sup>

In the words of Oli Ahad: "In his demand for the release of the political prisoners he decided to fast and drink only lemon juice. He fasted for 35 days."<sup>400</sup>

Dhananjan Das a Hindu Bhasani follower wrote:

This fasting was like Islamic fasting. ... The result of this was that the demand for the release for prisoners got wider publicity. As a result of Bhasani's fasting strategy, first he himself was released and then he urged the government for our release.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>398</sup> *The Weekly Ittifaq*, February 24, 1952.

<sup>399</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>400</sup> Oli Ahad, *Jatio Rajniti*, p. 184-85, Quoted in Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>401</sup> Dhananjan Das, *Amar Janmobhumi*, Sritimoi Bangladesh, 1971, (Calcutta), p. 108, Dhananjan Das, *The History of the Language Movement*, P. 552; Also quoted in Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

Bhasani's fasting is not an example of invoking a religious theme - - in this case one that could appeal to Muslims and Hindus alike. From the 18th April Bhasani started complete fasting, and for some time he became ill. He was admitted to Dhaka Medical Hospital. However, as his health started deteriorating, on the 21st of April the authorities released him from jail. It will be seen that all through his career Bhasani used pressure tactics such as fasting until death, to pressure governments whenever other methods did not work.<sup>402</sup> This seems similar to Gandhi's technique with which Bhasani became familiar in the British days to compel the government.

#### Bengals' United Front

After much reflection, East Pakistan's top Bengali leaders (Bhasani, A. K. Haq and Suhrawardy) realized that they would have to form an alliance to fight for Bengali rights. The United Front of the Bengalis was formed on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1953 led by Awami Muslim League, with other progressive parties. It had developed 21 points; notable among them was that the 21 of February be recognized as the Bengali language movement day. They campaigned all over East Pakistan with their top three leaders Bhasani, A. K. Haq and Suhrawardy. The result of the campaign was that it made the ruling Muslim League unpopular, and in its place, the United Front became a popular organization among Bengalis.<sup>403</sup>

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of April in 1954, the East Bengal Literary Conference Society, an association of cultural groups, organized a conference. Bhasani presided over the meeting, justifying his position on the language movement. In his speech he said, "It is

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<sup>402</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani; *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.



important to allow a people to have cultural freedom.”<sup>404</sup> Bhasani as a Muslim *alim*, his position to support the cultural rights of the Bengali people was a testimony to progressive thinking. Bhasani was not alone in this, Mawlana Azad who was also Sufi inspired leader like Bhasani believed in the cultural rights of minorities.

On the 8th of March, 1954 a general election was held all over Pakistan. The United Front under the chairmanship of Bhasani won the election. Since Bhasani always declined to take any position of power, the United Front chose A. K. Haq as the leader.<sup>405</sup> However, in the meantime, there had been political clash and conspiracy within the United Front groups on the question of who will become the chief minister.<sup>406</sup> The main leader of this “plot” was Mujib a favourite of Suhrawardy. Mujib wanted Suhrawardy to be the leader of the United Front to form government instead of Fazlul Haq. “Bhasani observing this ‘politics of conspiracy’ and ‘self promotion’ for position and power retreated to Santosh.” In the meantime, A. K. Fazlul Haq the ex -chief minister of the undivided Bengal was overwhelmingly chosen, to be the chief Minister of East Pakistan. The matter was made further complicated when, “Mujib led a procession to show his discontent. There was a clash with the police resulted in death of people which led to confusion in the politics of East Pakistan.”<sup>407</sup>

West Pakistani leaders took advantage of this chaos. To discuss the problem of the clash between United Front members in Dhaka city, the central government called

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<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>405</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor, (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed It)*, op. cit. p. 254. Also see Maksud, Bhasani, op. cit., 147.

<sup>406</sup> Maksud, *Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid*, pp.126-127. Maksud says during this time the newly elected AL leaders rush to acquire houses in upscale Dhanmondi areas in Dhaka as well as acquiring other properties through corruption were helpful to bring Martial Law in the country. See Maksud, Bhasani, op. cit. p. 153.

Fazlul Haq to Karachi, the capital of Pakistan.<sup>408</sup> The meeting went without incident, but on his way back to Dhaka from Karachi, A. K. Fazlul Haq stopped in Calcutta, (now with Indian West Bengal) and made some emotional but controversial statements about the Bengali people.<sup>409</sup> He said:

For the sake of politics even when the country (Bengal) is divided, the Bengalis of the two Bengals are indivisible.” He also made some comments about the demands for autonomy in East Pakistan which gave the Central government some cause for concern.<sup>410</sup>

The chaos in Dhaka created by Mujib and A. K. Fazlul Haq’s statements in Calcutta caused even further confusion. At this time Bhasani left East Pakistan to visit Europe to attend an International Peace conference in Geneva organized by leftist groups. Before he left for the conference he clearly showed his preference that Pakistan should stay away from American- backed SEATO and CENTO Pacts.<sup>411</sup>

#### Bhasani’s Europe Tour

Before Bhasani left for Berlin, he held a press conference on April 14<sup>th</sup> in Dhaka. He said that he was against American backed “Pacts that undermine the independence and sovereignty.” He sternly warned against signing any military pact. And for the sake of independence and sovereignty, he urged the people to fight *jihad* against the American imperialist lordship over Pakistan.<sup>412</sup>

It should be noted that all this time the main Bengali leaders were out of East Pakistan. A. K. Haq was in Calcutta, Bhasani left Dhaka for London, Suhrawardy, was in Zurich, Switzerland for medical treatment. On the 30th of May, the Governor General of

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., p.128

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., p.103

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

Pakistan, took advantage of the situation and dismissed the Bengali people's elected United Front of the Haq ministry on charges of the East Pakistan government's failure to stop the so called "Communist unrest." Using the 1935 Indian government rule Section 92 A, in East Pakistan the Central government introduced the governor's rule. It not only dismissed the government but also on his return from Calcutta put the chief minister Fazlul Haq under house arrest. Sheikh Mujib and thirty others were also arrested. The government also banned meetings and processions. Major General Iskander Mirza, then the defence minister, was appointed as the Governor of East Pakistan.

It is of note that Major General Iskander Mirza was the architect behind the Pakistan - American alliance in which Pakistan was also included in the Bagdad Pact. It was claimed that the Pacts were developed by America "to stop Communism in Muslim countries."<sup>413</sup>

Maksud says: In London, hearing the news of the dismissal of the United Front, Bhasani became restless. He said to his retinue: "Let's go, let's go to our country. Make reservations for me tomorrow."<sup>414</sup> Khondakhar Illias was with him in London, in his book Bhasani Jokhon Europea (When Bhasani was in Europe) says:

That night four people were standing by his bedside.... Even though it was winter, he was sweating. His head and forehead were hot. Standing by in a grim mood, was Professor Mozaffor Ahmad. Jashimuddin was silent. Tasoudduque Ahmad repeatedly wiped his sweating body. I stood near his head with a manual fan in my hand. That night was one of great anxiety for all of us.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>415</sup> Khondakhar Mohammed Illias, Bhasani Jokhan Europae (When Bhasani Was in Europe) (Dhaka, 1978), p. 128. Also see Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

The news of the dismissal of the United Front government was reported widely in the European media. The Prime Minister of Pakistan not only dismissed the newly formed Haq ministry but accused A. K. Haq, as being the "Indian agent," financially backed by India. The United Front was labelled as "the agent of Delhi, Moscow, and Peking." An arrest warrant was issued against Mawlana Bhasani, Mozaffar Ahmad, Khondakar Mohammed Illias, Faiz Ahmad and many other leaders that were with Bhasani. Within the country, many were arrested.<sup>416</sup>

Bhasani continued on from London to Stockholm then to Rome. He made speeches at innumerable press conferences, met with political leaders, labor leaders, reporters, intellectuals, was invited as the guest of honor at the British labor party's conference and later was made a member of the world peace council convention presidium in Stockholm.<sup>417</sup> Khondakar Illias says that "wherever he went reporters and labor leaders would surround him. Bhasani showed full of confidence, using his religious vocabulary" he said:

Pakistani people are part of the global struggle to survive against the decedents of Yazid and Namrud [oppressors]. We welcome the friendship of all people of all countries in this fight. War and destruction is not our motto. We want peace and construction. This is the main theme of Islam.<sup>418</sup>

Bhasani refers to Yazid, the son of the Muslim ruler Mu'awiyah of Damascus who persecuted Muslims similar to Namrud (the Egyptian pharoh) referred in the Quran as an oppressor. In this he was identifying the oppressors as one group of people throughout history against the oppressed even in his time and to him this as a universal truth even mentioned in the Quran.

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<sup>416</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>417</sup> Khundaker Illias, Bhasani Jokhan Europae (When Bhasani Was in Europe), op. cit., p. 9.

He was very proud of his religion. He said:

Standing on the podium of the world peace council, it came to my mind that I am the follower of a religion the name of which is peace. Islam is my religion. Islam is my philosophy. Islam is my cause for devotion. And the origin of the word Islam is from the Arabic word *salam*, which means peace. That is why I believe that no Muslim can betray the cause of peace but those who dare to betray, whether they are the real followers of Islam or not, only God can tell. I, as a follower of a religion of peace, will spend the rest of my life for the sake of peace and humanity. That is why the peace movement all over the world is my religious duty. To keep the world safe from another World War, I will therefore maintain my efforts to help stop it for you and sacrifice myself for it.<sup>419</sup>

Bhasani saw Islam as a religion of peace and his fight against oppressors is an ultimate struggle for peace. From this understanding he saw himself as part of the peace movement all over the world against oppression as also his own religious duty.

Unlike other leaders, even when working with people of different orientations, Bhasani displayed his commitment to Islamic vision in his speech. Throughout his Europe tour, Bhasani kept his traditional dress, with his Bengali peasant cap, *lungi* and *Panjabi*. He spent many busy months with European leaders. In his tour he also had the same luggage he carried all his life "one suite case, one *gamcha* (a Bengali towel), one *lungi*, one *Punjabi* (Bengal made shirt), one head cap, some tobacco leaf, and a lime pot. He travels all over East Pakistan with this luggage and which he also used in his Europe tour."<sup>420</sup> He practiced as inner values his humality, poverty and his affinity to people he represented, he expressed them in external codes even when he travelled outside the country. This is important in Sufism and perhaps even more in Indian Sufism - - of non-attachment to material goods.

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<sup>418</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>419</sup> Ilias, Bhasani Jokhan Europae (When Bhasani was in Europe), op. cit., pp. 280-287; Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit. p. 113.

<sup>420</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.111.

Bhasani stayed in Europe from May to December of 1954. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December he left for Paris from where he went to Calcutta. The government of West Bengal wanted to provide him and his retinue with food and lodging. But Bhasani declined. Bhasani stayed in the Tower Hotel in Calcutta. For five months, his expenses were paid by the Kidirpur Dockworker's Association.<sup>421</sup> Maksud says: "He did not want the Indian government to pamper him. He did however allow the Calcutta labour union's Kidirpur Dockworker's Association to pay for his expenses."<sup>422</sup>

General Iskander Mirza, the newly appointed governor of East Pakistan was very much against Bhasani, so much so that, even before taking charge of his job in 1954 he said "I will kill Bhasani as soon as he returns to the country." Faiz Ahmad who was with Bhasani during his trip wrote about Bhasani's reactions:

Hearing the threat, Bhasani became naturally very angry. Mawlana Saheb [Bhasani] called all of us and said "I will return to my country. Do the airline booking. Sikandar Mirza [Bhasani used to call Iskandar Mirza, Sikandar Mirza.' Sikandar' being an abbreviation of "Iskandar" or Alexander] threatened to kill me. I want to return to my country." We knew about the situation in the country. It was if like a Martial Law government. ..Mawlana said forcefully. "I want to be with the people to fight for their rights. I want to be present with them in my motherland".<sup>423</sup>

When Bhasani could not enter the country, leaders of the former United Front made statements urging the government to let Bhasani to be back to the country. A

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p.111.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>423</sup> Faiz Ahmad, "Sangrami Oitizzair Jagrata Chateona, Mawlana Bhasani" (The Tradition of Revolutionary Consciousness, Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mozlum Janonata Mawlana Bhasani, op.cit. p. 70. Also Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 106.

proposal was adopted under the chairmanship of Suhrawardy urging the government of Pakistan to immediately remove restrictions to his entry into Pakistan.<sup>424</sup>

As a result of this pressure the Central government made a statement that it would not take any action against Bhasani if he returned. Bhasani in reply said, "if the government does not change its policy, and if the oppression and arrest of innocent people and Communists are not stopped, "I will not return to Dhaka." However, a delegate of his party left Dhaka to persuade him and he decided to return.<sup>425</sup>

From 1955-57, there was a constant change of governments in East Pakistan as well as in the centre. However, the first constitution of Pakistan was drafted in 1956 where both Urdu and Bengali were accepted as the state languages of Pakistan but East Pakistan's autonomy demand was not recognized in the constitution.

On June 17th, in a meeting of the Awami League that took place in Dhaka, Bhasani as president, said in his speech, "if East Pakistan is not granted autonomy, the people and I will not accept the proposed constitution."<sup>426</sup> He said: "I suspect that if the ...exploitation is continued, then in the not distant future, the decedents of the people of this province will think about their destiny separately."<sup>427</sup> For such statements Bhasani was regarded by the ruling class, as an "anti-state person," an "Indian agent." This is especially following his time abroad in London and Calcutta.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>427</sup> Daily Sangbad, 16 January, 1956. Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit. p. 128.

<sup>428</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 128.

### Awami League Council Meeting, 1955

An Awami League party convention was held on October 9-10, 1955, to discuss Pakistan's joining with the SEATO and CENTO. Bhasani criticized the Pacts and demanded their cancellation. The importance of this meeting was very significant. Bhasani's anti- American stand even caused serious dispute within his own party. The pro-American Sheikh Mujib sided with Suhrawardy and anti- American socialist groups sided with Bhasani. At the meeting a proposal was accepted which said:

...Pakistan government in the past few years has signed the Pak-American military pact, Bagdad pact, SEATO Pact. These Pacts will destroy our sovereignty and will bring harm in the economic, commercial and independent business opportunities.<sup>429</sup>

Another important decision was also made at the meeting to give the party of which he was president a non-communal image. For Bhasani was a non-communal person but the name of the party he represented was called Awami Muslim League. Bhasani proposed that the word "Muslim" be removed. The party should be renamed as the Awami League. Bhasani justified his stand by saying:

The initiative to make the Awami League a non-communal organization was raised two years ago. And in the last council session, when the constitution of the party was made I was given the sole responsibility to decide. I was given the responsibility to ask for public opinion and called for a convention. I have consulted district and subdivisions workers and have come to the conclusion that most people of the country, especially the majority of party workers, not only desire but also want this organization to be noncommunal.<sup>430</sup>

Although Bhasani was a practising Muslim, this stand as the President of the organization shows his non communalism. The proposal was not unanimously accepted. Many influential leaders remained silent, even a group led by Abdus Salam opposed the proposal and walked out of the meeting. The party was still called the Awami Muslim

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p. 129.



League by some members for sometime, but eventually it changed its name to Awami League (AL), as Bhasani had proposed.<sup>431</sup>

This was not expected of Bhasani as a religious person. This gesture both surprised and annoyed the government and many right-wing observers believed from these actions that he was by now, “a Communist.”<sup>432</sup>

It is true that because of Bhasani’s Anti-American stand, many Bengali Communist started working with him within the AL.

However, the AL also comprised of rightist -leaning people as well. The leader of one such group within the AL was Suhrawardy. While for a time both left and right groups worked together, Bhasani’s serious anti-Americanism caused an anti-Bhasani faction to form within the party.

There was even more tension between Iskander Mirza and Bhasani on several points of foreign policy. In 1957 the central government was formed with Suhrawardy as the Prime Minister and Ataur Rahman as the chief minister of East Pakistan. At that time, the President of Pakistan was Iskander Mirza. Bhasani was the President of the AL. Bhasani was strongly committed to his anti-American policy but the pro-American groups were aligned with Iskander Mirza.

#### Kagmari Cultural Conference, *Assalamu Alikum* and its Reactions:

Bhasani in his long life organized many cultural conferences; one of the very important ones was the Pakistan Cultural Conference of 1957. It took place in Kagmari, a village in Tangail. It is also known as the Kagmari Conference. Throughout his life he

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

devoted his time to the educational and cultural advancement of his people. He combined his political activities among the peasants with educational and cultural activities. He maintained close relationships with intellectuals, as well as with musician and poets of different levels and he now invited them to his convention. The Kagmari Conference was perhaps the biggest he ever organized in the rural area Kagmari close to his permanent residence in Santosh. More importantly, the conference left a legacy in Pakistani politics.

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The conference was not organized by the central government or the provincial government or financed by them. It was organized by Bhasani himself, with the collaboration of Bengali intellectuals, artists and politicians and his Sufi followers.

Abu Jaffer Shamsuddin wrote:

It was not a regional, nor a provincial, or a national conference but an international conference. From the perspective of those days, to decide to organize it in a rural area was a courageous thing. People used to say that Bhasani's work in organizing conferences was done by angels and that is what happened in this conference. Within short notice the preparation work for the conference was completed.<sup>434</sup>

The organizers had to make contact from Kagmari. It was not easy to establish contact with foreign governments through letters, telegram and telephone. Besides the preparation committee, many other groups were also working in the organization from Kagmari. Maksud reports:

The organizers had to build the stage and prepare temporary accommodation for workers and guests and prepare food as well. All this was completed under his personal supervision and because of hard work day and night, the road from Tangail to Kagmari, about five miles long, was also decorated with innumerable gates. The gates were named after the leaders of the undivided India. Among

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<sup>433</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit. p. 140.

<sup>434</sup> Abu Jaffer Shamsuddin. "Kagmari Sanskritik conference Sriticharan", (In Remembering the Kagmeri Conference of 1957)," in The Daily Sangbad, 7 th February, 1982.

them were Mahmta Gandhi, Iqbal, Mawlana Mohammed Ali, Subash Chandra Bosh, Desho Bandhu Chitra Ranjan Das, and Barrister Abdur Rashul. In short the arrangements in Kagmari were unimaginable.<sup>435</sup>

At Bhasani's instruction there were also the gates named after Prophet Mohammed, Bengali Poet Nazrul Islam, and also Haji Shariatullah, and Titumir the leaders of the Bengali *Faraidi* movement, Urdu poet Hali and and Sufi thinker al-Ghazali. The naming of gates are Muslims and Hindus both underlines Bhasani's anti-communalism. It is interesting that one gate is named after Abú Hanífah, the putative founder of the law school dominant in the Sub-Continent, while another is named after al-Ghazálí, more of a hero to Sufis, though also holding a general Islamic and even modernist appeal. It is as if tolerance and universalism is here being declared also within Islam itself. In all there were 51 gates.<sup>436</sup>

Bhasani's respect for and identification with people who are from East Bengal, and other regions of the subcontinent and other nations, and religions but were great people are highlited. The famous Bengali writer Sardar Joinuddin who was one of the organizers wrote: When the government wanted to contribute two hundred thousand rupees for the seminar, Bhasani said: "Do not accept government contribution."<sup>437</sup> Khundaker Mohammed Ilias asked Bhasani, "Where will the money for expenses come from?" The Mawlana looked to the sky and said "God will give...."<sup>438</sup>

It is true that Bhasani was not alone. Refusal or reluctance to associate with temporal power has also been one of the features of much Sufism - - as well as being a

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<sup>435</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid

traditional Islamic religious value in general extending even to jurists and judges.

Joinuddin continues:

After we finished having tea, Mawlana took the lantern, and said, "Let's go, I will show you the spot for the conference." As we followed him he said standing in the middle of the bush, "I have constructed a small building. That is the Nazrul Library Reading Hall. You will inaugurate this during the conference. ..."<sup>439</sup>

Nazrul Islam was a Bengali poet much respected in the subcontinent for his noncommunal and revolutionary poems and songs. His famous poem is called "Bidrohi", (the rebel). He wrote:

...I am the Great Rebel, shall be quiet on that day  
When the oppressed people's wail on the sky and air will not resound  
The tyrant's dreadful sword will not flesh on the battle ground.  
I, the Rebel, tired of battle, shall be quiet on that day.<sup>440</sup>

In his poem "Women" Nazrul wrote:

I sing the song of equality.  
There is no difference in my eyes between a man and a woman....  
Did you see the stone? (at *Taj Mahal*) Did you see its soul?  
The heart of it is Mumtaz, a woman: the outer shell, Shahjahan, a man.<sup>441</sup>

Nazrul was a contemporary of Bhasani. Nazrul wrote revolutionary songs and poems about human equality and also against colonial rule that must have inspired Bhasani. After showing the Nazrul Reading Hall Bhasani continued the tour to show Sardar Joinuddin the spot where the conference will take place. Joinuddin says:

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid

<sup>440</sup> Poem translated from Bengali to English by Rezaul Karim Talukdar, Nazrul: The Gift of the Century, (Dhaka: Manan, 1994). p.39.

<sup>441</sup> Translated and quoted in Abid S. Bahar et al's "Poets who Shaped South Asia", East-West Dialogue, Volume 11, Montreal, 1999.

So leaving behind the narrow road we arrived at a street. I remember that street was higher than the mud field. In the field I saw a small pond, and by the side of the pond, a bunker-like long whole approximately 100 feet long was dug. He said

‘This is going to be the stove; food will be lentil and rice. In that boat, cooked lentil will be kept and rice will be kept on a mat. There will be about a thousand earthenware plates. Whoever wishes can take both rice and lentil to eat. When finished eating one can wash the plate in the pond and leave it in its place. That is all. What do you think? Is the system going to work?’...When I woke up in the morning, I saw that people had started arriving like rows of ants, from near and far. They were coming to hear the message of their *pir* from his mouth. Even today when I try to remember and write about it, it sounds like writing a genie’s story. Thousands of people came with two pounds of rice, and lentil, and carrying a bundle of wood to burn. Mawlana Shaheb had said “God will provide the expenses...” Then I saw the... huge stove which kept cooking for two days. Cooked rice and lentil were ready. Whoever desired took food on the earthenware plate and washed the plate in the pond and put the plate back in the stock.<sup>442</sup>

A few hundred thousand people gathered in the conference. The conference continued for 6 days.<sup>443</sup> Present at the conference was Suhrawardy, (the Prime Minister of Pakistan), the Premier of East Pakistan and top intellectuals, singers and other invited guests from the Indian subcontinent as well as from abroad.<sup>444</sup> Bhasani also named the road from Kagmari to Tangail “the world peace and the self determination road.”<sup>445</sup>

With the preparation of the conference, the stage was set for one of the biggest ideological confrontations Pakistani politics had witnessed since the independence of Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, within Bhasani’s AL itself, a rift started to appear between those who identified with the left-minded people; progressiveness, Communists and those who leaned more to the right.

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<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>443</sup> Nurul Haq Chowdhury, “Shatapdhir Ujjal Shurjo” (The Bright Star of the Century) in Mawlana Bhasani Sharinika, *Souvenir* 1977; Also in Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>444</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

At the 1957 conference, Bhasani spoke as the President of the AL. He warned the newly formed government, headed by Suhrawardy, not to repeat the mistakes of the Muslim League. He said "Power made them act improperly. In order to keep their personal and party interest, they imported religion into politics." Their logic was that since Muslims have one God, one religion, one Prophet, one holy book, they should also have one party only. This implied to them that any opposition party must be "anti state". Bhasani also stressed the importance of opposition parties in a parliamentary democracy. With these statements, Bhasani shows disagreement with the "populist Islam" of Pakistani politics that used religion for cheap political gains. Bhasani said:

The manifesto of the Awami League is that everything will be in the hand of the province, except foreign affairs, currency, and defense. Because East Pakistan does not have the full authority to spend all its expenses and because it doesn't control its industry, commerce, railway, post office ... its welfare can not be guaranteed."<sup>446</sup>

Bhasani also demonstrated his opposition to the Pacts, which was similarly disliked by right wing politicians in his AL party as well. He also said that the East Pakistan Awami League wants the government to establish friendly relations with every country and underdeveloped Pakistan should accept aid from foreign countries, keeping its equal status and without hurting its sovereignty. Thus he pressed for nonalignment in foreign affairs.<sup>447</sup>

The most controversial thing Bhasani said, which exploded like a bomb-shell, was "if the exploitation by West Pakistan is not stopped soon, in the near future East Pakistanis will say "*Assalamu Alikum*" (Good bye) to Pakistan." As a Muslim leader in words and actions the "*Assalamu Alikum*" was Bhasani's warning to West Pakistani

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<sup>446</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, p. 138.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

leaders using an Islamic vocabulary. However, his no to Pakistan was conditional, based on whether or not exploitation continues.

Reactions to the conference:

The pro-Muslim League newspaper Azad, in its editorial wrote, "We did not think we would ever be so unfortunate as to hear this type of low comment. Is it because of the possession of this type of belief that Bhasani conspires to destroy Pakistan?" Suhrawardy was already annoyed with Bhasani for his anti-American stand. Now he was alarmed by Bhasani's warning to the West Pakistani rulers that East Pakistan might say "good bye" to Pakistan. Suhrawardy reacted to Bhasani's comments by commenting about East Pakistan's autonomy demand. He declared that East Pakistan had been given 98% autonomy. On this issue, two factions of the Awami League began a bloody fight.<sup>448</sup>

The editor of *Ittifaq* was the most critical of Bhasani:

In this time of crisis in our nation ... to help the enemy, they organized a cultural convention in Kagmari. They made gates honouring the leaders of India and Russia and invited the renowned anti-Pakistanis. ... India did not miss the opportunity to use the resolutions in Kagmari in the UN. Indian representatives used them in the form of bulletin; news items in the UN. Mawlana should have realized that even after the independence of Pakistan Mawlana remained arrested in Dubri and was expelled from Assam. The newspapers in India did not protest then. Why today they make him a hero? Why do they make him the only great leader...?<sup>449</sup>

The fact of matter was that in his speech Bhasani also criticized India for keeping Kashmir by force against the wishes of the Kashmiri people.<sup>450</sup> This was ignored altogether.

Bhasani was already 72 years old. The Daily Ittifaq editorial wrote:

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<sup>448</sup> Maksud, Bhasani, p. 188. (Emphasis added).

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p.188.

<sup>450</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.* p. x.

The old Mawlana has finally joined with some opportunist, jumping dogs. The rumour was that with his decaying health and because of his old age, he retired from the works of his family but hearing the barking of the dogs he could not keep away from his temptations. Let's say that his health has decayed, old age has perhaps arrested him. But can these things stop him?<sup>451</sup>

The editor characterized him as a "*Lungi shar Mawlana*", implying "man without any substance."<sup>452</sup>

Bhasani's Kagmari Conference antagonized pro-Islamic fundamentalists, the rulers of Pakistan, and pro-American supporters of the A L. After this event prominent AL leaders like Suhrawardy was not happy with Bhasani. Consequently, Bhasani became the leader of the left leaning faction of his A.L.

Bhasani wished Awami League to be a party opposing imperialism and the feudal rulers of Pakistan. Suhrawardy was pro-American. So was Iskander Mirza. Mansur Ahmad observes: "Mirza's plan to separate Suhrawardy from Bhasani by giving him the position of Prime Minister worked. "I have realized that the plan was to create division between Bhasani and Suharwardhy." This actually happened.<sup>453</sup>

Debate on Bhasani's comments at the Kagmeri Conference continued. This type of blaming and counter blaming continued for months. Bhasani remained determined to get full autonomy for East Pakistan and demanded that Pakistan withdraw from the Pacts. Maksud says Sheikh Mujib remained loyal to Suhrawardy, and even led his goons to physically attack Bhasani. At the time of the attack in Dhaka, Bhasani was with West

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<sup>451</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 190.

<sup>452</sup> The editorial is cited in Mofizul Islam, *Upomohadesh Rajniti O Bhikthitta*, op. cit., p. 118. Also see Shamsul Huda Chowdhury, Akutarer Bijoy (The Victory of 1971), op. cit., p.18.

<sup>453</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor*, (Fifty Years of Politics as I Observed It), op. cit., p. 373.



Pakistani leader, Abdul Gaffar Khan. While passing by the stadium, stones were dropped over him from above. He was able to narrowly dodge.<sup>454</sup>

Despite such danger to his life from his own party members Bhasani was not ready to compromise with his principles, consequently the situation deteriorated to such a level that it was impossible for him to stay in the AL. There was a clear division between Bhasani and Suhrawardy supporters. During this time as Bhasani got out of Dhaka Medical Hospital, he was insulted with slogans like, "Down with the agent of India." On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1957 he resigned from the Party. Despite his hard work to establish AL and his love for it, it seems he "could not compromise for the sake of his principle that if he stays he had to be with the pro-imperialist forces."<sup>455</sup>

Despite the clash and hatred between the factions of the AL, Bhasani's resignation letter was not accepted for a few months and the post remained vacant. Bhasani was formally asked to withdraw the resignation letter. *Ittifaq* wrote: "The council showed leniency by asking Bhasani to withdraw the resignation letter. Despite Mawlana Bhasani hurting Awami League in every step, it seems he had no personal enmity with the party; the cause of the difference seems essentially ideological."<sup>456</sup> Maksud says Bhasani's hesitation was because what Awami League had preached from the time of its formation it did not practice when came to power. Thus, it became impossible for Bhasani to stay in the party. Again Bhasani gave more importance to his principles than to the party he established. Abu Jaffer Shamsuddin wrote: "In my small effort to understand Kagmari, I see the Kagmari

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<sup>454</sup> Abdul Matin, Amar Dristita Mawlana Bhasani (My Observation of Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.* p. 21.

<sup>455</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 178

<sup>456</sup> Manik Mia is cited in Mofizul Islam, Upomohadeshwar Rajniti O Bhikthitta, *op. cit.*, p. 118. Also see Shamsul Huda Chowdhury, Akutarer Bijoy (The Victory of 1971), *op. cit.*, p.18.

Cultural Conference as an event that had a far reaching role in the independence of Bangladesh....” Through Bhasani’s leadership; the Bengali people’s independent status was for the first time shown to the outside world. “This helped for building their independent political outlook.... The high water mark of the Bengali nationalist tide was reached in 1956. With that in the background, this event was the greatest blow to the unity of Pakistan.”<sup>457</sup>

Indeed, Kagmari conference and Bhasani’s saying “Goodbye” was a strong warning by Bhasani to the Pakistani rulers to establish equality between the two regions of Pakistan instead of playing populist religious slogans “Islam in danger” to keep it together. The other affects were that only one year and a half after the Kagmari Conference; the AL became formally split because Bhasani formed a new political party, the National Awami Party with other left-minded politicians of Pakistan.<sup>458</sup>

## SECTION 2: BHASANI WITH THE NAP (NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY)

Bashani’s outlook against imperialism was formed as part of his fight against the rich and the feudal class and their exploitative nature. To him alliance with America will develop dependence. It is defined by his understanding that these are governments by *Hukúmt-i nafsányiat* or the order of the tyrant. *Nafs* means soul, in the sense of "lower soul," "base instincts," or "selfishness," and *Hukúmat-i nafsányiat* means rule or government of the lower soul. *Hukúmat-i nafsányiat* is about selfhood, ego-centricity,

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Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>457</sup> Abu Jaffer Shamsuddin, “1957 Kagmari Sanskriti Conference Sriticharan,” (Remembering Kagmari Conference of 1957) in the The Daily Sangbad, 7th February, 1982, pp. 172-174.

<sup>458</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.191.

referring to a kind of mental or spiritual poverty.<sup>459</sup> Bashani fought to establish, in contrast, *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* that is lordly government, government aimed at realisation of the universal, godly and human values implied in the term "*rubúbiyah*" (*rubúbiyah* and *rabbáni* being derived from the same root in Arabic). *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* is not a theocratic Islamic state which applies rigid Islamic law, such as modern Islamists desire, but a godly government where people will be self reliant and not starve. It emphasizes the purity of character of the rulers, which for Bashani affects the entire population.<sup>460</sup> To Bashani only people with purity of heart can establish God's kingdom. This is class struggle is defined using Islamic terms. Bashani's focus on such values caused him to prefer to work with leftist groups aligned with Russia and China, rather than with America and its allies in Muslim countries. With this motto it became impossible for him to remain in the Awami League led by its new leader Suhrewardy. His choice was clear. He wanted to form a new party and called for an All -Pakistan democratic workers convention scheduled for July 25-26, 1957.

In this gathering those that came together included the rebel section of the Awami League, the leftist groups of East Pakistan, as well from West Pakistan. In East Pakistan some pro- China small parties also showed an interest such as Pakistan Democratic Party of Haji Danesh, and the East Pakistan Jubo League of Oli Ahad.<sup>461</sup>

At the covention Bashani presented a long written speech. He began by giving introduction to the history of fight in India between the oppressors and the oppressed (*zalim* vs *mazlím*) (oppressors versus the oppressed). Then he addressed, among other things, the

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<sup>459</sup> Psychology of the soul based in the Quran says that one should wear down one's soul, making it suffer and not to think oneself as a great person.

<sup>461</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.

condition of the peasants in the newly independent Pakistan. He also addressed the condition of industry, the Muslim League and Awami League promises (before they gained power), and Suhrewardy's betrayal of the autonomy of East Pakistan. These seem to be important issues to him that led him to take initiatives to form a new party. Presenting himself as a dedicated leader, he said, "Our countrymen will not tolerate betrayal." About foreign policy, he showed even greater concern. Indeed, foreign policy was the main cause of difference with the government in power.<sup>462</sup>

He gave a detailed opinion on this:

I am observing with great concern that the central Awami League coalition government is following in the footsteps of the Muslim League in its military pacts. By doing so it brings grave danger to our independence and sovereignty. The international Pacts made in collaboration with the Muslim League government, were harmful....

It is often said that for the development of our country we need American dollars. If there is unconditional foreign help, I don't object to that. We very much want that type of help. Unconditional help can make friendship stronger. But is there anybody who can show that even the unconditional help of America will bring about development? We are already getting American help through dollars. But still our economic problem is becoming deeper. And crores of people are starving or eating less.

The main reason that development does not come with American dollars is that in giving such help, America attaches such strings that the countries receiving donation lose their political and economic independence. I will use some conditions of the contracts to prove this point.

In the early part of 1954, when the pacts were signed, the then Prime Minister, in reply to my telegram, sent me information about the conditions of the donation packages. These were then published in the newspaper. I am citing some conditions of the deal.

In the first paragraph of the 4th topic it said: Those employees of the Pakistan government will get from the United States, ...according to the contract they will stay in Pakistan but perform the duties of the USA and according to the pact the USA will have the authority to decide and supervise how to use them and they will get the necessary help and privileges. According to this pact, US citizens

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p.197.

working in Pakistan will be considered as part of the US embassy and will be under the control of the director of the diplomatic mission. At the instruction of the US government, the Pakistan government will give high ranking US land and air force official diplomatic status.<sup>463</sup>

Bhasani seem quite informed of US foreign policy regarding American aid for development in Pakistan as such policy was no secret to anybody. President Kennedy also articulated clearly this policy. US economic aid, like its military aid was designed to maintain "a position of influence and control around the world."<sup>464</sup> This shows that Bhasani was right to say that the economic and political benefits to the US were not unimportant. With its aid program as the thin edge of the wedge, the US expanded its share of Pakistan's imports from 6 percent in 1952 to as much as 40 percent in the early 1960's.<sup>465</sup> Feroz Ahmad writes "So faithfully did the Pakistan's rulers do this that one of the top advisors to Pakistan had this to say about this development." He wrote:

Policies have been framed to assure that the government intervenes in the economy when such intervention is in theory desirable, while leaving in private hands the decisions which, according to theory, should be left to private initiative.<sup>466</sup>

This illustrates that Bhasani did have cause for concern. About Pakistan's development with American economic help Feroz Ahmad adds: "Pakistan's dependence on

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<sup>463</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit. pp. 197-198.

<sup>464</sup> America's late president quoted Kennedy was quoted by Harry Magdoff in The Age of Imperialism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), p. 117. Also see Feroz Ahmad, "Structural Matrix of the Struggle" in Gough (ed.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit. p. 426.

<sup>465</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Structural Matrix of the Struggle" in Gough (ed.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, pp. 426-427.

<sup>466</sup> Gustav Papanek, Pakistan's development Quoted in Feroz Ahmad's "Structural Matrix of the Struggle" in Gough (eds.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit., p. 427. (Emphasis added).

foreign economic aid was so colossal that 35 percent of its First Five Year Plan, and 50 percent of its Second Five Year Plan were supported by external loans and grants.”<sup>467</sup>

Bhasani's opposition to the US-Pakistan trade deals and military alliances shows his understanding of the colonial and the postcolonial policies of America. Thus, it is understandable why he fought against these Pacts. It seems that he knew what he was doing.

Bhasani said:

According to this contract, the freedom of the American soldiers in Pakistan to inspect, and to direct, and the unlimited privilege given to them is building their influence over our army. The foreign officers are free in our country.... They will enjoy the diplomatic status and our government will not have any control over them.... if our army's freedom is subordinated, how the sovereignty of Pakistan will be preserved?<sup>468</sup>

Finally, in his long speech he emphasized the importance of ideology, and the dedication of political leaders to bring about changes. He concluded by saying that:

...the fight between truth and falsehood, exploiter and the exploited, *zamindar* and the tenant, money lender and the debtor, capitalism and socialism continues. But change requires more dedication than there currently is. Take for example the Prophet of Islam and his companions and the history of modern China's freedom and development.<sup>469</sup>

In the above statement he refers to the importance of activism giving example of the Prophet and his companions to bring about changes. He also did not hesitate to refer to changes in China. Bhasani continues:

East Pakistan's ...peasants, landless- labourer, labourers working in small factories, owners as of small businesses, elementary and high school teachers, and fisherman their hard work sustains Pakistan's existence. If they survive Pakistan will survive. It is only with their sincere cooperation that constructive work in industry, commerce, education, health and development is possible....<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "The Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh" in Gough (ed.), Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit., p. 427.

<sup>468</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

Although Bhasani wished to warn the Pakistani rulers, his intention was to bring together anti- American forces in Pakistan.

To bring a new hope to people, and to establish our independence and the ideals of democracy, I have invited the democratic forces of East and West Pakistan to unite.

... Even if the leaders of different political parties betray, if democratic-minded people of both wings of Pakistan unite on the principles of independence and democracy, only then will there be freedom for the dispossessed population. ... That day, our Pakistan will become one of the best countries in the world.<sup>471</sup>

This shows that although his opponents saw him as a “man with opposition mentality” and an “Indian agent,” “a Bengali nationalist,” he seemed to dream of helping to make Pakistan a democratic and developed country. He saw American aid and alliance as an obstacle to this goal. To him, America is not a sincere partner and its interest was to exploit Pakistan for its own benefit.

The second day of the convention was to decide the name of the organization and to write its declarations. The independent development of the national economy and the conception of a pro-people, noncommunal government also were issues to be discussed. The foreign policy issues were anti-imperialism, opposition to war, establishment of world peace, the eradication of neo-colonialism, freedom of Pakistan from imperialist influence, solidarity with nonalignment movements, and formulation of policies in the interests of the working class. These conditions were accepted with great applause. Although there were some other suggestions for the name of the new party, “Awami National Party” was unanimously accepted as the name. *The word Awami meaning “people” was accepted to*

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<sup>471</sup> Sammelon Comittee Pustika, “Conference Committee Booklet”, Part 1, pp.759-773. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 201.

honour the wish of Bhasani.<sup>472</sup> As a mass leader Bhasani wanted to be with people and he liked such name for the new party.

As mentioned earlier, Bhasani was often mistaken for a serious Bengali nationalist, especially after his Kagmari Conference. However, one will notice that although he believed in the cultural rights of Bengalis, his new Pan- Pakistan NAP Party was formed with elements from East and West Pakistan, Bhasani as being the President. In this he demonstrates that he was more than a Bengali nationalist. His nationalist stand has more to do with his belief in the cultural rights of people. He started this new party at a great cost of sacrificing his love for the AL in favour of his principles.

After the convention was over there was a meeting scheduled at the Paltan grounds in Dhaka. There were clashes between A L and NAP members. Bhasani spoke briefly. The meeting ended in chaos. Many NAP members from both wings were injured.<sup>473</sup>

Despite much trouble, thus, NAP as a left leaning party, headed by Bhasani, came into existence as a strong force against American influence in Pakistan. It also supported India's non-alignment policy for Pakistan. Because of the fact that many of its members were Communists themselves and were supportive of India's nonalignment policy at the time, Bhasani was branded by many a "Communist" and an "Indian agent."

#### The Military Coup by Ayub Khan

In September of 1958, it was announced by the government of Pakistan that in February of 1959 there would be a general election on the basis of the 1956 constitution and different political parties were getting ready for the election campaign. Then, to everybody's

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<sup>472</sup> Ranesh Maitra, "Etihasher Mandonde Bangladesher Bum Andolon"(A critical history of the left politics in Bangladesh) Daily Azker Kagoz., 24th June, 1993. Also Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 201.



surprise, the Pakistani army declared martial law in the country and took power. The leader of the coup was General Ayub Khan. Ayub Khan later revealed that he had consulted officials in Washington, including the CIA chief Allen Dulles, before declaring Martial Law in Pakistan.<sup>474</sup>

During this time, not only Bhasani formed an alliance of anti-American, pro-labour elements but as Mansur Ahmad observes, in West Pakistan, Sardhar Abdur Rab Nistar, after becoming the president of the Muslim League also took an anti- American stand. Ahmad believes that American observers realized that Mirza and Suharwardy would not be able to survive in the central government against a Communist take- over. That is why America was against the election.”<sup>475</sup>

It should be noted that the US used Pakistan as a base to stop the so called “Communist expansion in South Asia.” Thus, “US military assistance converted Pakistan’s army into the paramount political force in the country-the great defender of the privileged classes and a deterrent to possible social revolution.”<sup>476</sup>

The leader of the coup upon assuming power dismissed Central and Provincial Assemblies. This led to the end of democratic process in the newly independent country, Pakistan.

East Pakistan, despite the fact that it held the majority of the total population of Pakistan in Eastern wing, was seen by the new coup leader as the periphery of Pakistan. Ahmad says Ayub never hid his views. During the time of Iskander Mirza, Ayub was then

<sup>473</sup> Ibid. Also Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 204.

<sup>474</sup> M. Ayub Khan, Friends, Not Masters, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967 ) , p.59.

<sup>475</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhaka Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor (Fifty years of Politics as I See It), op. cit., p. 431.

the defence minister of Pakistan and the chief of the staff made comments about East Pakistan, that "East Pakistan is indefensible." "The defence of East Pakistan lies in West Pakistan."<sup>477</sup>

General Ayub regarded Bengalis as inferior. According to Ahmad, Ayub once said to him "East Pakistanis are the aboriginals of India. They are in religion and culture more Hindu influenced."<sup>478</sup> Such openly stereotyped attitudes by the non-Bengali elites were frequent among such leaders, one of them being the new leader of Pakistan, not helpful in building the confidence of people in the new Pro-American Pakistani military leadership. This type of mentality was expected to lead to regionalism of "Us" vs "them" attitude among the peoples of the two wings.<sup>479</sup>

Feroz Ahmed says:

In terms of regional relations in Pakistan, the ascendancy of the military amounted to greater enslavement of East Pakistan. Military rule not only precluded any possibility of East Pakistan asserting its demographic strength in parliamentary elections, but the army's growth also led to more brutal exploitation.<sup>480</sup>

The day Martial Law was declared, Bhasani was in Mirzapur Hospital in Dhaka getting medical treatment. There he was arrested under the Security of Pakistan Act, (1952) and was sent to Dhaka Central jail. He was charged with "Activities which are prejudicial to the security of Pakistan and its external affairs."<sup>481</sup> Many other leaders were

<sup>476</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh", in Gough (ed.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia. op. cit., p. 429.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>478</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed It). op. cit., p. 457.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>480</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh", in Gough (ed.) op.cit., p. 429.

<sup>481</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. op. cit., p. 240.

arrested including Abul Mansur Ahmad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Suhurwardy. Bhasani remained in jail from 1958 to November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1962.<sup>482</sup>

The leader's jail term was quite long. Mansur says, "In the jail I first discovered that Bhasani was not arrested on corruption charges, but on the security act...."<sup>483</sup> "When things started to relax, I learned that Mawlana and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were gardening." They were sowing egg-plants and flowers in the jail compound. "Near the end I thought the stay was getting so long that they were doing it to enjoy the fruits of their garden."<sup>484</sup>

There had been student protests and demonstrations, demanding the release of the political prisoners; Bhasani started fasting on 26th October, 1962. He was released on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1962 after close to 4 years in jail.<sup>485</sup>

Pakistan's friendship with America increased during Ayub's time. Ayub assured the USA of his complete allegiance. He said in a 1961 address to the US Congress, "If there is real trouble, there is no country in Asia where you will be able to put your foot. The only people who will stand by you are the people of Pakistan."<sup>486</sup>

During Ayub's rule, United States had provided billions of dollars in grants and loans, mainly loans in the later years, for Pakistan's development. During this time the economic disparity between East Pakistan and West Pakistan increased significantly." Feroz Ahmad says:

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>483</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amer Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor, (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed It), op. cit., p. 435.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>486</sup> Area Handbook for Pakistan, DA Pam. No. 550-48 (Washington, D.C. Superintendent of Documents, October 1965), p. 339. Quoted in Feroz Ahmad's "The Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh" in Gough (ed.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit., p. 427.

These developments ... aggravated already existing regional strains. The robber -barons were all West Pakistani; given their preference to invest in West Pakistan, the growth of this class amounted to increased disparity between the two regions. By the end of the notorious "decade of development" (1958-1968), West Pakistan's GDP exceeded that of East Pakistan by 34 percent, the official disparity in per capita income had become 62 percent, and the real difference in the average standard of living had widened to 126 percent.<sup>487</sup>

The manner in which foreign aid and foreign advice helped in widening this gulf was stated by Feroz Ahmad that: foreign advice emphasized private enterprise and investment in the more "conducive" atmosphere of West Pakistan.; the public sector followed suit by heavy allocations for the economic infrastructure centred in West Pakistan.<sup>488</sup>

After his release from jail, Bhasani began touring the whole country, meeting with people in small groups. On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1963, Bhasani gave a long and strongly worded statement imploring all to work together for a truly democratic order so that people can think freely, talk freely, work freely, and for the betterment of the condition of the masses.<sup>489</sup>

Bhasani's decision to leave the AL and form the NAP in 1957 was clearly a choice in favour of the pro people left politics over the bourgeois pro- American politics of Suhrawardy. After his release from jail his inclination increased measurably toward China. Besides Pakistan's Pro-American stand, Pakistan also maintained a close relationship with China. Ayub took advantage of Bhasani's liking for Chinese Socialism.

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<sup>487</sup> A. R. Khan, "A New Look at Disparity," Forum, January 3, 1970.

<sup>488</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh", in Gough and Sharma (eds). Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit., p. 426.

<sup>489</sup> The Pakistan Observer, 3 March, 1953. Also Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 242.

On August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963, Ayub invited Bhasani to Rawalpindi in West Pakistan. Since the 1950's, the Pro- China Communists had supported Bhasani and the NAP. Now Ayub sought Bhasani's help in further improving relations with China. Newspapers widely reported the possibility of a Bhasani-Ayub alliance. In response, Bhasani denied the claims as a baseless rumour which had been "made by people with vested interest."<sup>490</sup>

However, in 1963 Ayub Khan proposed to send Bhasani to China as a representative of the government. Bhasani declined the offer saying:

If I go to China I will not go at the expense of the Ayub government. I will go as a guest, at the invitation of the Chinese government. I will go in the interest of the nation". In the end the other Pakistani delegates went from Hong Kong to China, while Bhasani flew separately from Rangoon, Burma to China by Chinese Airlines.<sup>491</sup>

Moshiur Rahman says: he did not go as an ambassador of Ayub.<sup>492</sup> As expected he distanced himself from the military ruling class, to him the government of Ayub was a *Hukumat-i nafsanyiat* or the order of the tyrant.

#### Bhasani Goes to China

It was on September 24<sup>th</sup> 1963, that Bhasani left for China. He remained there for 7 weeks. He was invited to the revolution day ceremony and was honoured as a guest head of the state. As mentioned earlier, Bhasani identified himself as a peasant who had special liking for Chinese socialism, perhaps because of its priority for the economic development of its peasants. He was overwhelmed by his experience of China. He met with Mao-Tse Tung. Whether it was because of Mao -Tse Tung or for the sake of the international politics of the time, Bhasani offered some support to Ayub's foreign policy.

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<sup>490</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 245.

<sup>491</sup> Moshiur Rahman, "Mawlana Bhasanir Oitizza", (Mawlana is our Tradition) in Quayyum (ed.) Mozlum Janonata Mawlana Bhasani, op.cit. p. 50

At one point, when Ayub protested the American policy in Vietnam, Bhasani congratulated him on his “progressive” foreign policy. But as will be seen Bhasani never completely stopped criticizing Ayub’s policies because, Ayub’s “populist Islam” was different from Bhasani’s “popular Islam.”

However, upon Bhasani’s return, his meeting with Ayub and his visit to China as a state guest were viewed by many with suspicion, both within his own party as well as outside. He was also criticized by the pro-Soviet group within his party for his pro-China approach. In all, the trip and his pro-China stand again made him controversial.<sup>493</sup>

Feroz Ahmad says:

... The Bengali left groups, represented by the NAP party because of its insistence on nationwide social justice and partly due to its cooperation with the regime on account of its “friendship” with China, alienated itself from the national movement. The NAP was a national party which was not only concerned with the regional grievances of East Pakistan but was also seeking an end to the imperialist grip over Pakistan as a whole.<sup>494</sup>

Feroz Ahmad says:

Any support for the government was viewed by Bengalis as collaboration with the enemy. Under Chinese influence, the NAP went beyond the extent of principled support for the regime’s “anti-imperialist” policies: it shied away from confronting the West Pakistani ruling structure on all substantive issues.<sup>495</sup>

#### World Religionist conference for Peace

In the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa, people of most Muslim countries remained suspicious of the atheist nature of socialism. However, as a Muslim leader, Bhasani kept working with the Communists. While he repeatedly said that his

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid

<sup>493</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., pp 246- 247.

<sup>494</sup> Feroz Ahmad, “Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh”, in Gough and Sharma (eds.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit., p. 434. (Emphasis added)

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

ideas were Islamic, his close association with Communists made it look as if he was a Communist himself. However, his Islamic perspectives on *rubūbiyah*, and its commitment to social justice, confined him to the circle of the leftists rather than with pro-American Muslim Leaders. It can be observed that at this time, because of Ayub's pro-China policy and the NAP's Pro-China and Pan -Pakistan policy, Bhasani politics remained relatively quiet for a while. During this time, every leftist political activity continued to remain banned in Pakistan. Most socialists and Communists thus worked under Bhasani's shadow. He remained allied with them to fight for social justice rather than to serve the pro-American Muslim group's interests.

On July 27<sup>th</sup> 1964, Bhasani attended the World Religionist Conference for Peace in Tokyo, where he said: "In this strife-torn world there can be no more- noble thing than to work for peace. The cause of peace is the cause of human conscience."<sup>496</sup> "An effort must be made to stop exploitation of religion by certain powers."<sup>497</sup> In "Islam, the religion of peace", "the real religious person does not allow war, hatred, and communalism. Today the imperialist powers are abusing religion." He warned the leaders of the newly independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America to remain "vigilant."<sup>498</sup> Despite the allegations that he became a "Communist," his continued commitment to Islam is clear from these statements.

#### Anti- Rabindranath Propaganda and Bhasani's Protest

Bhasani's progressive policies were also evident in other areas. In 1965, war broke out between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. On September 13<sup>th</sup> he along with

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<sup>496</sup> The Pakistan Observer, 6 August 1968. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op.cit., p. 257.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

other East Pakistani intellectuals and politicians made a statement condemning the “Indian aggression.” The Indian attack was also condemned by the Hindu leaders of Pakistan, yet the Pakistani government stereotyped the Bengali Hindus as the enemies of Pakistan.<sup>499</sup> Maksud says:

Hindus became the target of India bashing. Bhasani was clearly annoyed. Bhasani had always fought against violation of religious rights. He, as a leader, did not tolerate oppressive measures against minorities. He understood the Ayub ploy. On 25<sup>th</sup> October 1965, in Parbotipur public meeting, he warned the Pakistan government to stop harassing the Hindus. He made similar protests through radio broadcasts.<sup>500</sup>

In April to July of 1967, Bhasani was hospitalized for illness. He had prostate operation. Upon his return to Santosh after he left the hospital he made a statement against government’s Hindu bashing. Bhasani was very much exasperated by the government. In the mean time, Ayub government also censored the works of Rabindranath Tagore, a world famous Bengali Hindu poet who received the noble prize for literature. To find out for himself, Bhasani started reading Rabindranath Tagore’s works.

Bhasani must have studied Tagore’s famous short story ‘*Kabuliwala*.’ Rahmat a Muslim character in *Kabuliwala* is an immortal character Tagore ever created. Here the poet felt that one heart wants to meet another irrespective of caste, creed, land and language.”<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 257.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., p.269. (Emphasis added)

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> Md. Majir Uddin Mian, “Muslim Society and life as reflected in the Literature of Rabindranath Tagore” in S. R. Chakravarty and Virendra Narain (ed.) Bangladesh, History and Culture, vol. 1, (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1986), p. 166.



In *Manihar* we find a sincere expression of *namaj* (prayer) of a boatman. Tagore wrote:

Then the sun has set...The boatman is offering his 'namaj' on the roof of the boat. Pictures of his silent prayer were being drawn time and again on the canvas of the burning western sky. Innumerable colourful pictures of silent language falling on the calm water was becoming light from deep, from golden to steel and one colour was weeping out by another.<sup>502</sup>

To show his respect to the Muslim Bengali poets, Tagore dedicated his *Basanta* (*The Spring*) (1923) a drama to Kazi Nazrul Islam. He even sent a wire when Nazrul, as a political prisoner, was protesting against the atrocities of British prison officers by going on a hunger strike, "GIVE UP YOUR HUNGER STRIKE, OUR LITERATURE CLAIMS YOU."<sup>503</sup> Tagore gave a plot of novel to Jasim uddin, patronized Bandey Ali Mia and Golam Mostafa. Unlike his predecessors like Ranglal Bandopadhyaya, Yotirindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, who suffered the so-called "*Javan*" prejudices. His political philosophy was that "Indian nation could not be thought of without the Muslims."<sup>504</sup> Tagore was "secular in thought and liberal in attitude." Bengali people irrespective of religious differences are admirers of Tagore and Nazrul. Bhasani became convinced that Tagore was a great humanist poet. Bhasani said about the poet that, contrary to government claims, Tagore in fact praised "Islam as a great religion."<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Rabindra Nath Tagore, *Galpa Gussa*, ( V. B. 1367 BS) pp. 991, 993-994, quoted in Md Majir Uddin Mian, "Muslim Society and life as reflected in the Literature of Rabindranath Tagore" in S. R. Chakravarty and Virendra Narain (eds.) *Bangladesh, History and Culture*, vol. 1, (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1986), p. 167.

<sup>503</sup> Abid S. Bahar et al, "Poets Who Shaped South Asia" in *East-West Dialogue*, *op. cit.*

<sup>504</sup> Rabindra Nath's *Coat-ba-Chapkan*, R-R-12 (V.B., reprint, 1385, BS). Also cited in Md. Majiruddin Mian, "Muslim Society and life as Reflected in the literature of Rabindranath Tagore", in S. R. Chakravarty (eds). *Bangladesh, Vol. 1: History and culture*, (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1986), p. 162-170.

<sup>505</sup> Md. Majiruddin Mian, "Muslim Society and life as Reflected in the literature of Rabindranath Tagore", in S. R. Chakravarty (eds). *Bangladesh, Vol. 1: History and culture*, (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1986), p. 162-170.

Bhasani said:

The information Minister Mr Sahabuddin declared that Rabindra songs are against the integrity of Pakistan, therefore, they will no longer be broadcast by radio and TV.

Sometime ago the central government minister, Sobur Khan also made similar statement. I want to find out if their statements are the attitude of Pakistan government.

I say Rabindranath through his novels, literature, short stories, drama, and music pushed Bengali to a new glory. Rabindranath's contribution is universal. Islam advocates the birth of truth and beauty. Rabindranath cherished the banner of this glory.

That is why those, who in the name of Islam, are attacking Rabindranath are actually not believers of Islam's position on beauty and truth. For that reason I am urging my countryman to defy the motives of the present government.<sup>506</sup>

The Dainik Pakistan reports:

The day after this statement was made; the information minister clarified his position on Rabindranath from the Pakistani conservative position. There was also a meeting of the top Bengali intellectuals. At this meeting, it was decided to fight against any conservative attempt at censorship. There was also reaction against Hamidur Rahman, the Supreme Court justice who advocated that both Bengali and Urdu should be written in Arabic letters.<sup>507</sup>

Realizing the communal character of the government, Bhasani began the anti - Ayub campaign and continued until the fall of the Ayub regime in 1969. Bhasani's commitment to Islam as well as his fight against communalism is an expression of his virtue of appreciating the Muslim tradition of love for beauty and tolerance to other religious faiths.

In September, Monaim Khan, the governor of East Pakistan threatened intellectuals stating that necessary actions would be taken to punish the intellectuals

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<sup>506</sup> The Dainik Pakistan, 28 June, 1967. Also Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, pp. 281-282.

<sup>507</sup> The Dainik Pakistan, 14 August, 1967. Also in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 282.

working against the integrity of Pakistan.<sup>508</sup> Bhasani's argument was that the Ayub government's communalism was contrary to his *rububiyah* beliefs in regard to the cultural and religious rights of all people irrespective of religion.

#### Bhasani's reactions to Mujib's six point Demands

As a result of Ayub's repressive rule over the country, Bengalis could not forget their demand for autonomy. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, now as the President of the A.L., came up with his famous six point demands on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1966.<sup>509</sup> They were presented first at the all party Pakistan integrity conference in Lahore of West Pakistan. The six point demands concerned mainly the autonomy of East Pakistan. Upon close scrutiny, one finds that the six point's demands renewed the demands of the A L when Bhasani was the President. As expected what is missing in the new A L program was Bhasani's anti- imperialist stand. This seems to be because Mujib was a pro-American leader.

Feroz Says: "The Awami League, with its six -point program of regional autonomy, became the unchallenged standard -bearer of the Bengali movement. The Awami League program was essentially a bill of rights for the Bengali petty bourgeoisie."<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 286.

<sup>509</sup> The six points are: (1) a federal and parliamentary form of government, with supremacy of the legislature, based on direct adult franchise and proportionate representation; (2) the federal government to have responsibilities of defense and foreign policy only; (3) separate currencies or other alternate means of preventing the transfer of resources from one region to the other; (4) fiscal policy and power of taxation to be in the hands of the regional governments; (5) regional governments to control their foreign exchange earnings and to have the power of negotiating foreign aid and trade; and (6) paramilitary forces to be provided to the regions. Cited in Feroz Ahmad, "The Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh" in Gough and Sharma (eds.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit. p. 447.

<sup>510</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "The Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh", in Gough and Sharma (eds.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, op. cit., p. 434.

Bhasani initially criticized the 6 point demands because it did not mention anything about imperialism or about "peasants or working class people." However, as the autonomy demand started to gain momentum, Bhasani no longer criticized it openly on the ground that it demanded the economic and cultural rights of Bengalis.<sup>511</sup> Feroz says, due to the emphasis on military spending by the military government in power in the country as a whole the military expenditure was a big burden.

The overgrown military establishment consumed as much as 60 percent of the country's revenue budget. Not only did it consume resources of both regions, but East Pakistan's foreign exchange was vital to its survival, especially after 1965, when it had to buy spare parts and new weapons in the black market. Since military head quarters were located in West Pakistan and 90 percent of its ranks and almost 100 percent of its top positions were held by West Pakistan and East Pakistan was denied a share in the local expenditure ...and of the job opportunities it created. After all, the military's role as the guardian of capitalism and the pulverizer of the popular will expediated the colonization of East Bengal [East Pakistan] and diminished the possibilities of peaceful change in the regional relationships.<sup>512</sup>

Feroz Ahmad says:

[AL in its six point demands asked] the right to negotiate foreign aid and trade for the province, [by such demands it] threatened the vested interests of the West Pakistani military and bourgeoisie. Its program of abolishing the central civil service and replacing it with proportional representation from the provinces ran counter to the interest of the West Pakistani bureaucracy.<sup>513</sup>

For sometime after the 1965 India -Pakistan war, things were relatively quiet. The 6 point demands of Mujib were gradually making the quiet environment of Pakistani politics noisy again.

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<sup>511</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 270. (Emphasis added).

<sup>512</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh", in Gough and Sharma (eds.), Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid. (Emphasis added).

### 1968 Agarthala

In 1968, the Ayub government arrested members of the AL, NAP, and many prominent Communist Party members. On 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1968, the government said in a press release “some of the arrested went to Agartala (in the Indian territory) and met with Lt. Colonel Misra and Major Mannon, and discussed with them the conspiracy” to separate East Pakistan from Pakistan.<sup>514</sup> Later a press release said that Sheikh Mujib was also found to be involved as one of the planners and the executors of the conspiracy. He was also arrested.<sup>515</sup>

On January 15<sup>th</sup> 1968, Bhasani, in a press conference, said: “The existing government is a dictatorial regime, representative of American imperialism, indigenous feudalism...” He said he would “meet and work together with people with whom he had differences in the past, and if needed would go to jail.” He demanded that the government “withdraw all the false allegations and asked for the release of all the jailed political prisoners.”<sup>516</sup> This was a hint by Bhasani that he will work with Mujib against Ayub Khan’s regime that does not want to establish democracy in the country. Bhasani’s devotion to democracy might be worth some remarks: current Islamist movements tend to be authoritarian- e.g. the theocracy in Iran, loyalty of Sunni movements to an “amir.” Yet for Bhasani, democracy and Islam seem to go together. Even if he did not make any explicit statement to this effect, his actions demonstrate that belief. Again, the difference

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<sup>514</sup> The Dainik Sangbad, 7 January, 1968, Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

<sup>515</sup> The Dainik Pakistan, 19 January 1968. Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, 308.

<sup>516</sup> The Sangbad, 16 January, 1968. Also in Maksud’s Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

between this attitude and modern Islamism is striking. In fact, Bhasani's style of Islamism in general seems different in every way from current Islamist movements.

After the "Agartala Conspiracy Case," as it was commonly known Bhasani sought permission to hold a meeting in the Palton ground in Dhaka. The request was rejected by the authorities. Then on January 27<sup>th</sup> he organized a meeting in Kustia. He said, "If the government continues what it started, we will be compelled to observe civil disobedience." The proposals that were accepted in the meeting were: (1) the release of all the political prisoners, (2) full provincial autonomy for East Pakistan, (3) and the withdrawal of the nation wide state of emergency.<sup>517</sup> The next day, the hearing of the sensational Agartala Conspiracy Case started and Bhasani began an anti-government mobilization tour of the country.<sup>518</sup>

As he toured the country, the whole Bengali nation, irrespective of political parties, rallied behind him against Ayub. The demand was that the case should be withdrawn before there would be negotiation with Ayub. Bhasani boycotted the Round Table Conference initiated by Ayub. In the face of his opposition, Ayub withdrew the case. As will be seen, this event alone had a far reaching effect on the relationship between East and West Pakistan.

### The 1969 Mass Uprising

Maksud says: Bhasani, in his political career took the role of a supreme leader in Assam against the Line System, in Pakistan against the Muslim League government; now in 1969, he again took on the role of a supreme leader of the movement, commonly

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<sup>517</sup> APP issued news in the *Dainik Pakistan*, 28 January, 1968.

<sup>518</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 308.

known as the Mass uprising of 1969. This was against General Ayub Khan, known as the 'Iron man' of Pakistan.<sup>519</sup>

East Pakistan was slowly becoming united in the face of West Pakistan's refusal to accept its demand for autonomy. Meanwhile in West Pakistan, Ayub's long term allies and friends had switched their allegiance to opposition and an environment of unrest was gradually growing. Bhasani's call for uprising finally rang the alarm bell.

On December 5<sup>th</sup> 1968, Ayub came to Dhaka. He warned reporters that violators of the law and order would be severely punished. On the same day, Bhasani urged his countryman to overthrow "the rulers and exploiters." He said, "if the rulers fail to understand the need for the autonomy, the democratic franchise, and the freedom of press, East Pakistan will secede from Pakistan." Bhasani's opposition to Ayub regime was for its tyrannical nature which he repeatedly called the *Hukumat-i nafsányiat*. To get rid of this government and make the demands effective, Bhasani called for a general strike on 7th December.<sup>520</sup> The Dainik Purbodesh wrote:

Finally, the political temperature is rising in Dhaka. The determined population is out on the street. Yesterday, in a Baitul Mobarak ground meeting Bhasani called for a transportation strike, which even Bhasani and the NAP could not imagine would create a huge momentum in the city.<sup>521</sup>

There had been clashes between police and the public and some people were killed in the remote areas of the country. After the December 5 meeting, Bhasani led the congregation in prayer for the dead.

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

On December 9<sup>th</sup> a statement was released by Ayub saying that he would not tolerate any attempt at the disintegration of the country. He said strong measures would be taken against elements working against integrity and independence of Pakistan.<sup>522</sup>

### The Beginning of *Gherao*-Movement

In the past, the leaders of political parties had been either from the aristocratic class or from the urban middle class. Contemporary political movements were also urban centred. The mass uprising of 1968-69 by Bhasani, included both rural lower class as well the urban middle class. Maksud says that he united people in the city as well as in the rural areas. This was achieved through the call for *gherao* movement which he started on December 28<sup>th</sup>. On that day at a huge public gathering he said, he will boycott the election as long as Ayub is in power and that he would request his party adopt this decision. He wanted the unity of all the parties. He said, "This is not to win the election but to gain the rights of the common people." After the meeting, a procession led by Bhasani took possession of (*gherao*) the office of the District Administrator of Pubna. That was the beginning of the *gherao* movement.<sup>523</sup>

Bhasani's was fighting to gain the rights of the common man. Indeed, it was his fight for human rights. Kamal Lohani says, "It is easy for politicians to criticize their opponents but it is hard to be courageous to face of the enemy. Mawlana was the source of this courage. ...He was a constant source of news."<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid, p. 317.

<sup>524</sup> Kamal Lohani, "Bitarkitra Charitra Mawlana Bhasani"(The Controversial Character Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani). op. cit., p. 137.



Bhasani used different methods to compel the rulers to accept the demands, for example, fasting, organizing meetings and demonstrations. But *gherao* as a technique in the mass uprising was not decided by the executive committee of his party but its use seems was his own brain child.<sup>525</sup>

Before he started the movement, Bhasani emphasized that “rulers/exploiters” and their helpers /puppets have their forts even in the rural area. “If you only remove Ayub and Monaim, you will still have them through their agents. You have to remove Ayub’s basic structure, the “basic democracy,” with a new technique and that is through *gherao*-movement.<sup>526</sup> Soon the news of *gherao*-movement spread all over the country. On December 29<sup>th</sup> in Monohordi of Dhaka District, 3 people were killed when police opened fire on them. As a result of the *ghero*-movement, people became angrier and it became regular tool of showing discontent against the rulers.<sup>527</sup>

On 2nd January, 1969 a NAP executive committee meeting was held with Bhasani presiding. At the meeting, it was decided that the NAP would boycott the election until the autonomy demand was fulfilled. Different parties from East and West Pakistan wanted to form an alliance, but Bhasani refused to join the alliance until the autonomy demand and the anti -imperialist stands are not adopted as part of the platform of the proposed alliance. On January 13<sup>th</sup> in Hatirdia, Dhaka, at a public meeting, Bhasani said that unless the right to vote and full autonomy based on the principles of Lahore

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<sup>525</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit, 317.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., p.317. (Emphasis added)

resolutions were accepted, East Pakistanis would stop paying taxes. He said that although the peasants did not have guns, not even the army could suppress them.<sup>528</sup>

While most leaders remained in urban centres, Bhasani quickly left for rural centres to develop the anti-Ayub uprising. Bhasani's student supporters were also active in the city carrying out the *gherao*- movement. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, a student leader named Asad was killed and three other people were injured. In a protest on January 21<sup>st</sup> Bhasani called for a nation wide strike. More and more political leaders were arrested or got killed all over the country. Ayub sent a telegram to Bhasani insisting him to join the round table conference of leaders. In reply, Bhasani demanded that Mujibur and other political prisoners be released or he would not join the conference. In an emotional outburst he wept in front of the reporters and said: "Today I went to the hospital and I have seen with my own eyes the unspeakable oppression by the government. I have seen many dead bodies and injured persons, not even children were spared from this oppression."<sup>529</sup>

Bhasani had been demanding the release Mujib and the release of the prisoners of Agartala case. There had been slogans "Jaler Tala Bhangbo, Mujib ke Anboo"(We will break the lock of Jail and free Mujib." The trial started on 3rd week of June, 1968 and the hearings ended on the 27th January 1969. Bhasani demanded the withdrawal of the case. As the case neared its final phase of conclusion, Bhasani continued his *gherao*-movement.

In the face of the uprising the government withdrew the Agartala case and released all those charged, including Mujib. Bhasani advised Mujib not to join Ayub's

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<sup>528</sup> The Dainik Azad. Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>529</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

round table conference. Leaders from West Pakistan came to persuade Bhasani. In reply he said: When the “oppressor and the oppressed” sit for negotiation, it is always the case that the “oppressor” wins. There will be no negotiation with the “oppressor” (*zālim*).<sup>530</sup> Bhasani said: He did not believe in negotiation with the “oppressor.” “The people will achieve their demands through rigorous movements.”<sup>531</sup> Despite the request from Bhasani, Mujib joined the Round Table Conference. In the mean time, for Mujib’s safe return from jail he was given a hero’s welcome by his party. He became a very popular leader in East Pakistan, even eclipsing Bhasani. Bhasani detested Ayub and was opposed to meeting with him to work on a compromise. While most political leaders joined the conference, Bhasani remained outside. After returning from West Pakistan, Mujib said, “It is because of some of the leaders of East Pakistan that progress could not be made.” He mentioned the name of some members who had joined the conference and said, “Mawlana is quite old; it is about time for him to retire from politics.”<sup>532</sup> It is clear that Bhasani’s stubbornness not to compromise with the military rulers came from his commitment to fight against pro-American military rulers and Ayub’s widespread human rights violations.

#### Fall of Ayub and the Imposition of Martial Law:

Bhasani did not call off his continued boycott and *gherao* movement. To cool down the situation, Ayub Khan removed from power Monaium Khan the “much hated” governor of East Pakistan. Bhasani still continued the unrest. In the meantime, Bhasani was invited by the NAP of the West Pakistan wing to meet with them. He arrived in West

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<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

Pakistan on March, 8<sup>th</sup> 1969 to meet his party members. Bhasani already angered some people in West Pakistan for his stands. On March 16<sup>th</sup> in the Shahinwal Rail Station, Jama'ati Islami followers attacked him which he narrowly escaped. Leaders, irrespective of ideology expressed their anger about the attack. Jamati Islami was angered by Bhasani's anti-Ayub movement. Bhasani's ideological differences with the Jamiati Islami that supported the military rulers of Pakistan are that Bhasani fought for democracy and social justice as an Islamic ideal while Jamiati Islami party was more concerned about the integrity of the country and unity among Muslims within the Islamic state. Bhasani's anti-Ayub stance was so threatening to his life that on March 24<sup>th</sup> when he returned to Dhaka, he was received by his followers, some of whom had acted as his guards.<sup>533</sup>

The Round Table Conference was taking place in West Pakistan. Bhasani maintained his stubborn stance of not joining it even when he was in West Pakistan. Back in East Pakistan he continued the movement. Finding it impossible to continue in power, Ayub decided to resign and sent a letter to the chief of the army, General Yahya Khan. In the letter he said regretfully that "although I have tried everything, nothing works. All attempts are meaningless. Therefore, I find no other alternative but to resign from power ... the army is the only workable and legal machinery left to control the country."<sup>534</sup> Finally, "through Bhasani's *gherao* movement, Ayub's era came to an end."<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> The Dainik Pakistan, 15th March, 1969. Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, p. 327.

<sup>533</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 327-328.

<sup>534</sup> The Dainik Ittifaq, 26th March, 1969. (Emphasis added). Also quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, p. 328.

<sup>535</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.328.

Bhasani's role in the fall of Ayub led to his fame throughout the world. In the US, Britain and in India, he made the news headline. Time Magazine titled him the 'Prophet of Violence.'<sup>536</sup> It described him as a revolutionary mass leader.

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, General Yahya Khan introduced martial law and dissolved the National and the Provincial assemblies. The next day Yahya Khan declared that election would take place among the adult –franchises and that the elected members would prepare the next constitution.

Yahya Khan promised to establish democracy upon taking charge. He declared the date of election to be October 5<sup>th</sup> 1970. He also promised that martial law would be withdrawn and power would be transferred to the civilian government of elected representatives.

#### 1970 Tidalbore and the phrase "*Ora Kau Ashe Ni!*" (They did not come!)

It is already mentioned that Bhasani's NAP was a left -leaning party. But it also had a small faction of rightist followers. As the election date was declared, Abdul Motin, a leftist leader in the party, decided to boycott the election. Moshiur Rahman, the leader of the rightist faction, was in favour of contesting the election. Bhasani sided with the extreme left group, within his party. He decided to boycott the election. Unlike other parties his decision seems to be guided by his religious outlook and his vision of how things should be will be seen later.

It is to note that while Bhasani's uncompromising stance led to Mujib's release, Bhasani's decision not to participate in the election confirmed the NAP Party as the second most popular party after the AL. Thus, the AL, a nationalist rightist party with its

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<sup>536</sup> Weekly Time, 18 April, 1969. Also quoted in Maksud, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, pp. 328-

leader recently released from jail, contesting in the election made it the most popular party in the country.

Under the circumstances, while the country was getting ready for a democratic change, another significant event accelerated the process to end united Pakistan, which was the 1970 tidalbore that struck the coastal regions of East Pakistan. Approximately two million people lost their lives. Relief materials started arriving from all over the world. Surprisingly though, the Pakistani rulers remained unmoved. For the first few days, there was no immediate help from the government of Pakistan. Yahya Khan, on his way to West Pakistan from China had a stop over in Dhaka and immediately left for Islamabad.<sup>537</sup>

At this time, Bhasani was sick and admitted to Chittagong hospital. He was ill with a respiratory problem. Doctors advised him not to talk and advised complete rest. Bhasani normally listened to the BBC radio. Hearing the news of disaster on November 12<sup>th</sup> from the radio he left for the affected area. He went to Sandwip, Hatiya, and Potuakhali. He witnessed many decomposed bodies of humans and animals. He also saw that those who had survived the cyclone were also dying. He cried with his fellow Bengalis that he could not help.<sup>538</sup> Mohammed Hossain who was with him in the tour wrote:

[Bhasani] was touring the Southern part of Noakhali. It was a Friday. He went to a Mosque to pray. After the prayer, the congregation requested that he say something. He started the lecture by saying:

*'Huqúq Allah and and Huqúq al-'ibád* both are like two wheels of a vehicle. One can not function without the other. *Huqúq Allah* that is worship of God and

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<sup>537</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., pp. 355-356.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid, pp. 355-356. (Emphasis added)

*Huqúq al-'ibád* that is serving humanity. Without the second, the first can not be complete. Without the second, God does not accept anything. Prayer and fasting are compulsory, *jihad* is also compulsory. Before everything *jihad* is compulsory, so prepare yourself in *Huqúq al-'ibád* and to liberate the country and make it independent. Get ready for *jihad*." <sup>539</sup>

Even when *jihad* is not one of the five pillars of Islam, in the orthodox view, it is nevertheless, an important principle in Islam. Here Bhasani takes *jihad* to mean something like "struggle against injustice," relying no doubt, on the root meaning of word, "struggle." The word more traditionally implies military struggle; though it seems, in this statement, that Bhasani himself does not exclude the possibility of that aspect. Modern Islamists thought has tended to elevate the status of *jihad*, especially in the fact of Western dominance and incursions. <sup>540</sup> Here Bhasani also elevates *jihad*, though his motive is rather class and national struggle. He politicizes Islam (*Huqúq Alláh and and Huqúq al-'ibád*) are like two wheels) but to a different purpose than most Islamists.

Bhasani was shaken by what he saw during his tour. He was also shocked seeing no immediate help coming from the Pakistani rulers. He saw there is no *Huqúq al-'ibád* in the character of the Pakistani leaders. Based on this incident Bhasani seem to have decided the fate of the country. Bhasani returned to Dhaka and cried before the reporters and said '*Ora Kau Asse Nee*' ('they did not come'). It was a candid expression. Surprisingly, this simple utterance sent shock waves to Bengalis so much so that, it turned the Pakistani rulers into "them" who did not come (in our distress) vs Bengalis as "us." He said that he will expose those who are cautioning people in the so called 'save

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<sup>539</sup> Mohammed Hossain "Mawlana Bhasanike Jamon Dakechi" ("The way I saw Mawlana Bhasani") in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani)*, op. cit. p. 239.

<sup>540</sup> S. Abul Ala Maududi, *UL-Al-Jihad Fi Islam* (In Urdu). Also for information on Jihad see S. Abul Ala Maududi's *Fundamentals of Islam*, (Lahore: Islamic Publications limited, 1988), p.241.

Islam' slogan, and who are trying to hide everything, and he said, "we will revolt." Bhasani was always suspicious of the feudal Pakistani rulers who pretended Bengalis as Muslim brothers but gave only lip service to them. He wanted to expose that there is nothing Islamic about it in the bond between East and West Pakistan.

After his return from the affected areas, Bhasani organized a meeting on November 23<sup>rd</sup> in Polton Moidan. It was a historic movement for the nation. Bhasani, after describing the situation, surprised everyone by using the slogan "Hail Independent East Pakistan."<sup>541</sup> The declaration was made news in India and abroad.

Many people, including some in his party, found Bhasani too radical to declare independence before the election promised by the military rulers. However, later developments proved that Bhasani was right in not participating in the election and negotiations with the Pakistani rulers.

Immediately after Bhasani's declaration of independence the election was held. In East Pakistan out of 162 seats Awami League won 160, a landslide victory. In West Pakistan the majority seats went to Pakistan People's Party (PPP). It won only 88 seats. AL was the majority party and ready to form the government with the six point's demands as its mandate. The talks to transfer power began. However, on December 20<sup>th</sup>, Bhutto said: The PPP will not seat on the opposition side. Butto's remark has the indication that despite Bengali majority in winning seats, power will not be transferred to Mujib.<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.* When Mujib was asked to comment on this, he said, "I have been fighting for autonomy demands not independence." For details see Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, p. 325.

<sup>542</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 350. (emphasis added)



Indeed, Abul Mansur Ahmad believes, the government of Yahya estimated in East Pakistan that AL would not be able to form a majority, because seats will be distributed among 13 political parties. They thought that out of 169 seats East Pakistanis will not get more than 100 seats. "They underestimated the Bengali unity."<sup>543</sup>

After the election, Yahya conspired to deprive the AL of its power. Abul Mansur Ahmad says: "They promised democracy, but refused to deliver it. Now they could not say no but claimed that a constitution based on six points would not be tolerated because it would destroy Pakistan."<sup>544</sup>

As Mujib won the majority vote, the National Assembly was expected to be held in Dhaka, however, Bhutto warned his members not to go to East Pakistan to attend the National Assembly. At this time, surprisingly, the President also gave a circulation that the 3rd March meeting was cancelled and blamed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for the current problems. Mansur observes, "This made the people of East Pakistan frustrated and angry. Mujib, in order to keep up with the popular demand, called for a strike and noncooperation movement for seven days."<sup>545</sup> On January 18<sup>th</sup>, Bhasani in a public speech in Rangpur said that even in the face of any threat to Bengalis, he would continue his fight for an independent East Pakistan. To the surprise of many, some NAP leaders resigned from the party because of Bhasani's radical stand on independence. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, in a huge public gathering in Gaibanda, he said: "Those who are resigning are Communists, I am a Muslim, and I will die as a Muslim..."<sup>546</sup> Bhasani called Butto a

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<sup>543</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amer Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed It), *op. cit.*, p. 524.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526.

<sup>545</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.* p. 387.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

“betrayed” for not being fair with Bengalis.<sup>547</sup> By all these gestures Bhasani seem to be defending him as a Muslim and his religious vision that those leaders who claim to be Muslims should be fair and honest in politics. I think that there is a long Sufi tradition of objection to unjust rule, so Bhasani is in that tradition.

In the mean time, some members of the NAP extremist faction, Matin- Alauddin made a flag. It had green background and, in the middle, a rising sun. Within a month this flag became popular.<sup>548</sup> This would later become the flag of the independent country of Bangladesh.

Maksud observed: Starting from the first week of March the trust between Mujib and Bhasani was becoming normal again on grounds of independence.<sup>549</sup> The *Dainik Pakistan* in its headline news said: Mujib-Bhasani will unite.<sup>550</sup> The report said: “On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, Mujib gave a speech calling for a non-violent non-cooperation movement. Bhasani supported Mujib’s non-cooperation movement. However, the army opened fire on the people. Hundreds were killed.”<sup>551</sup>

The President announced that on the 25th of March the national assembly would start its session on March 6<sup>th</sup>. By this time the situation was getting out of control and Bengalis were slowly gravitating towards the idea of separation. Mujib scheduled a meeting on March 7 and learned from sources that at this meeting people will demand independence. He also learned that if he declared independence the army would open fire

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<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>548</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit.*, p. 387.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, p.390.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.390.

on the meeting. Therefore, in the speech, he did not declare independence.<sup>552</sup> Instead he laid down four conditions before making any compromise with the government (1): The army must return to the barracks. (2) The oppression it committed would be investigated. (3) Martial law would have to be withdrawn and (4) in the mean time power would be transferred to the elected representatives.<sup>553</sup>

Mujib said that he would join the assembly only after the four points were met. Rao Farman Ali the defense secretary of East Pakistan wrote that Mujib said to him “I can not join the Assembly stepping on the dead bodies of people.”<sup>554</sup>

During this time, on the one hand, the Pakistani government ordered the arrival a great number of army with new commanders to East Pakistan from the Western wing.<sup>555</sup> And on the other hand, Yahya returned from West Pakistan to continue talks with Mujib. Bhasani obtained the news from a private source that “Yahya will not transfer power.”<sup>556</sup>

It will be seen Yahya Khan kept Mujib busy in talking until the 24th of March while preparing his army to launch its attack on the Bengalis.

#### Pakistani Army Invades East Pakistan

Mujib continued the talks with Yahya Khan. On March 23<sup>rd</sup> Yahya Khan, Sheikh Mujib and Butto jointly, gave a declaration that the assembly is postponed for an undetermined period of time. It mentioned that this was done with Mujib's permission.

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<sup>552</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amer Dhekha Rajnir Ponchas Bochor, (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed It), op. cit., pp. 337-338.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>554</sup> Ali, Rao Farman. Butto, Sheikh Mujib O Bangladesh (Butto, Sheikh Mujib and Bangladesh). (Translated by Mustafa Harun). (Dhaka: Shoukin Prokasani, 1978).

<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

<sup>556</sup> Moshir Rahman, Mawlana Amader Oitejo (Mawlana is our Tradition) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 56.

Mujib did not protest this. Mansur Ahmad observed “At this I realized that Sheikh (Mujib) had not only made a wrong move he also had stepped in the trap laid by Yahya and Butto.” Referring to Mujib’s confusing moves, Mansur Ahmad says, “I did not understand Mujib then, I do not understand him now.”<sup>557</sup>

It seems Bhasani, suspecting the Pakistani ploy to keep “the politics of conspiracy” with their fellow countryman, did not join in the election, even long before he declared the independence of East Pakistan. This was another indication that Bhasani as a politician understood Pakistani rulers that it would not accept the Bengali demands for equality. To Bhasani, that is “unIslamic.” Therefore, there was no point of bargaining about what he realized was not attainable from the Pakistani military, unislamic rulers. In this, his pragmatism for the independence of Bangladesh seems prevailed over notions of reconciliation which under the circumstances was not possible.

On March 9<sup>th</sup> standing in the Paltom Ground, he reiterated “Nobody could keep the seven crore Bengali’s demand suppressed and in this struggle there is not going to be any compromise.”<sup>558</sup>

During this time Bhasani was concerned about the condition of the minorities. He requested that the Bengalis, the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Beharis to try to forget their differences and keep peace. He said, “I love the Beharis. They came to this country after much suffering.”<sup>559</sup> Beharis are an Urdu speaking Muslim minority who migrated from India to East Pakistan in 1947. This shows that although he demanded independence for East Pakistan, he does seem to be propagating an extreme nationalist sentiment but

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<sup>557</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amer Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor, (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed It), op. cit., p. 551.

<sup>558</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 391.

was worried about the minorities. He seems to be fighting for equality and rights of the Bengalis.

On the night of March 24<sup>th</sup>, Yahya secretly left Dhaka for West Pakistan, ordering the army to invade Dhaka. At 11:30 p.m. the next day, the Pakistan army without warning started the invasion. As expected Mujib was not ready, nor were the people. Mansur Ahmad narrates: "Sheikh Mujib surrendered without resistance. He did not try to escape nor hide himself." Mansur Ahmad questioned "Is this the way the leader of a people fight against opposition?"<sup>560</sup>

During the first months, Pakistan army crushed the small scale resistance by the Bengali police, army and border guards. Within a short period of time, the attack on people led to an influx of a huge number of refugees from East Pakistan to India. It is estimated that about 10 million Bengali people, including this present author, became a refugee in India.

On the night of March 25<sup>th</sup> when Pakistan army started the invasion in East Pakistan, Bhasani was in Santosh. One of the targets of the army was Bhasani.

Syed Irfanul Bari wrote:

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March, at Bhasani's instruction, I left for Dhaka and I saw innumerable dead bodies piled up here and there. I left Dhaka to make a report about what happened to Bhasani. As I came back to Santosh, I saw from a distance, fire was set to his house. The army asked people "Did you see the *Kafir* (infidel) Bhasani?" Bhasani was sad to see that some of his valuable books, including a copy of the Koran, were on fire.<sup>561</sup>

Bashani in this report called "*kafir*" that is unbeliever. During Pakistan period he was branded by Pakistanis as a "*kafir*." It was motivated by his tolerance of minorities

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 392-393.

<sup>560</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amer Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor, (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed It)*, op. cit., p. 555.

<sup>561</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., pp. 403-404.

and that it is a jibe at his Sufism, Sufism being a suspect stream of Islam in the eyes of modernist Islamists in general. It is obviously, in any case, an attempt to exclude Bhasani's brand of Islam with a very different one (legalistic, authoritarian). I think this statement also reflect the feeling of Urdu –speaking Pakistanis that they are the “real Muslims,” whereas Bengalis follow a syncretistic (Sufi-Indianized) altered –kind of religion.

#### Bhasani Goes to India for Shelter:

As an ally of China, Bhasani might have been likely to seek asylum in China. But Pakistan's alliance with China led him to decide to go to India instead. Rashed Khan Menon wrote:

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1971 after the fall of Dhaka....I was instructed to contact the Mawlana (Bhasani). As I got to Tangail, I realized that the Pakistani army was near. ... I found him in a house of his follower, located near his own house in Santosh. I asked him "*Hujur*, are not you going to leave?" After a little silence he said: 'If I have to leave the country, I have to go to India. Nehru was my friend! Indra will keep me as a guest. But Subash also went outside his country, but couldn't do anything.' He asked me to check if the fire set to his house still could be seen. After a little while when I returned, I saw him not in the house but slowly going into the paddy field alone, from where he slowly disappeared from my sight.<sup>562</sup>

Before entering India, Bhasani sought permission from the government of India. When he went to the border, an Indian Central government minister named Moinul Haq, who had been his secretary in the Assam days, came to receive him at the border with permission from Indra Gandhi.<sup>563</sup> Saiful Islam who was his travel companion during the war time says, "He was not in the good books of either the Assam government or the

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<sup>562</sup> Rashed Khan Menon cited in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

<sup>563</sup> Saiful Islam, Shadinata, Bhasani, Bharat (Independence, Bhasani, India), *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8. (Emphasis added).

central government of India. That is why he also wanted to cross the border with permission from the authorities.”<sup>564</sup>

When he crossed to the Assam side of the border, Saiful Islam describes that Bhasani followers were lined up on both side of the road to greet him. Bhasani also went to visit *Bashan Char* in Assam, visited the graves of his friends and colleagues to show respect, spoke at various gatherings and explained why he had lost faith in Pakistan. While in India, he also visited among other places, Hindu pilgrimage centres, *Gita Bhavan*, the temple of Mohesh Joshi near Himalay, Norinda Nagar, and few other places.<sup>565</sup> As a believer of *rubúbiyah* principles Bhasani does not seem to have problem to respect and appreciate other religious people and places.

During his time in India, Bhasani wrote to Muslim countries requesting their support for Bangladesh. In India, he was made the chairman of the advisory committee of the government in exile. Wherever he went he had an armed brigade guarding him.

As the war began on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1970, which involved India, Saiful Islam notes that Bhasani was secretly taken from Hospital to an area in Delhi.<sup>566</sup>

Bhasani’s safety was of much of a concern to his Bengali followers as well as well-wishers abroad. Lord Fanner Brookway, the president of MCF in London also wrote to Indra Gandhi about Bhasani’s safety described the situation: “...During five days spent in Delhi, I therefore, contacted every possible person in the Indian government for help in

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<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>566</sup> Saiful Islam, *Shadinata, Bhasani, Bharat*. (Independence, Bhasani, India), op. cit., also see Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 419.

getting in touch with Mawlana Bhasani. ... All informed me that they had no idea of the whereabouts of Mawlana..."<sup>567</sup>

On July 30<sup>th</sup>, the Indian High Commissioner in London replied that the Indian government does not know anything about Bhasani's whereabouts. "He is of course not in Indian custody."<sup>568</sup> Devi Prosad, the General Secretary of the War Regiment International wrote:

During my thirteen days tour of the Delhi and Calcutta area, I enquired about the above matter with many people whom I thought might know about Mawlana Bhasani and his activities. Nobody seemed to have any specific information nor could anybody refer me to some persons who had met the Mawlana in recent weeks.<sup>569</sup>

Saiful Islam who was with him says: "Bhasani was in fact under house arrest in northern India." There, "no outsider was allowed to have contact with him." Whatever was Bhasani's condition in India, it is clear that Indian government did not allow his free movement. The war ended on 16th December, 1971 when East Pakistan became Bangladesh as a new country.

It is evident that firstly, Bhasani lost faith in the Pakistani leaders from the start for changing the Lahore resolution without consultation with the Bengali leaders. As mentioned earlier that Lahore resolution recognized regional autonomy. Secondly, he did not like Pakistan's alliance with America.

Bhasani built two institutions early on; AL and *Ittifaq* that provided leadership in the fight against the undemocratic rulers of Pakistan. In Pakistan, he understood that it is under the grip of military rule, which he called, the "*zálím* doing *zulm*." He seems

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<sup>567</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.435.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.



decided early on in Pakistan period that it was futile to continue dialogue with them, so he deliberately started the *gherao* movement against Ayub and later declared the independence of East Pakistan.

Many wondered how Bhasani's approach could be Islamic when fighting against the existence of an Islamic state. Bhasani cited Ayub's regime similar to Mu'awiyah a populist Muslim leader. In this he had drawn parallel in Islamic history to justify his struggle. To this end Bhasani worked with non-Muslims, Communists and even sought Indian help to fight against Pakistani rulers. This is different from Jamiati Islami. This is his sense of what he was being called to respond to in the present. This flexibility to work with non Muslims and the Communist was possible for his sense of justice and his strong belief in the unity of being.

Despite all the challenges, Bhasani did not often apologize or falter. He did not fear anybody, demonstrating that he was not accountable to any person but to his principles.

## CHAPTER 6: BHASANI'S VISION AND LEADERSHIP IN BANGLADESH (1971-1976)

After 24 years East Pakistan seceded from Pakistan in 1971 and became an independent country named Bangladesh. Bangladesh has borders with India in the west, north and east and with Burma in the south east and in the south of Bangladesh is the Bay of Bengal. It is a delta country located at the meeting point of two great rivers, the Ganges and the Bramaputra. Its fabled abundance of wealth and prosperity in pre British period articulated in Tagore's song: *Amar Sonar Bangla Ami Tomai Valobashi*. (My Golden Bengal, I love you) was adopted as the national anthem of Bangladesh, and Nazrul Islam was made the national poet. Recognizing two Bengali liberal poets as national symbols, demonstrate Bangladesh's heritage of South Asian liberal Islam. It celebrates its independence day on December 16<sup>th</sup> for its success in gaining the linguistic cultural and economic freedom first from the British and then from Pakistan. Here people's main source of livelihood is agriculture and fishing. In size, it is slightly smaller than Wisconsin.<sup>570</sup>

During the liberation period (March 25, 1970-December 16, 1971) the two top leaders of Bangladesh; Bhasani and Mujib were outside the country. Mujib was in jail in Pakistan after he voluntarily surrendered to the Pakistani army. Bhasani left for India to lead the government in exile but was under house arrest.<sup>571</sup> After a period of 8 months Bengali freedom fighters with Indian help freed Bangladesh from Pakistani occupation.

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<sup>570</sup> Yahoo Reference: "Bangladesh" World Fact Book, Bangladesh, September 20, 2002.

<sup>571</sup> Azad Sultan, Mawlana Bhasani Saranika 91 (Mawlana Bhasani Souvenir), (Santosh, Mawlana Bhasani Academy), 1991, p. 6. Also see Mawlana Abdul Matin, "Oitihāsik Farakka Long March and Mawlana Bhasani" ("The Historic Farakka March and Bhasani's Role"), in Azad Sultan (ed.) Mawlana Bhasani Saranika 91. (Santosh: Mawlana Bhasani Academy, 1991), p. 32. The latter source estimates the loss as approximately 35 crore taka.

Mujib was released from the Pakistan prison and returned to Bangladesh on January 10<sup>th</sup> 1972. Bhasani returned to Bangladesh on a later date.

One will recall that in 1970, Mujib had been elected the majority leader from East Pakistan in the All Pakistan election. Now upon his return from Pakistan and based on the results of that election, he became the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh. During this time Bhasani's absence was greatly felt. Within a week of Mujib's return, the Dhaka news papers raised the issue of Bhasani's whereabouts in India. Many Bangladeshis and Bhasani's well wishers outside Bangladesh became concerned about Bhasani's safety. This was also because of the Indian government's denial of Bhasani being in India. Mujib persuaded India, to let Bhasani return. Bhasani returned to Bangladesh. Government level talks led to Bhasani's safe return to Bangladesh on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1972. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1972 Bhasani made a statement expressing his and his party's gratitude to India's Prime Minister, Indra Gandhi, for helping Bangladesh to become independent.<sup>572</sup> This seems only a gesture of courtesy by Bhasani. The fact that during his time in India he had been under "house arrest" and that he was aware of large scale "illegal transfer of movable properties to India from Bangladesh by the Indian army made Bhasani unhappy."<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, 439-440. Also in a Press Trust of India (PTI) dispatch dated, January 22, 1972, Bhasani said: "The people of Bangladesh will never forget this woman (Indra Gandhi) of great heart and the great people of India." Jotu Sen Gupta, History of Freedom Movement in Bangladesh (1974), p. 46.

<sup>573</sup> Syeda Umm-e-Habiba says "The loot was partly planned and organized for the benefit of Indian industrialists who wanted to acquire jute machinery installed in East Pakistan since 1947" The Story of Pakistan, <<http://www.storyofpakistan.com/profile>> Also see Dewan Azraf, "Smritir Aloke Mauana Bhasani", (Mawlana Bhasani in my memory) in Azad Sultan (ed.) Mawlana Bhasani Saranika 91, Santosh, Mawlana Bhasani Academy, 1991, p.17. The Indian army immediately after the independence of Bangladesh started plunder of much needed resources (industrial parts, vehicles, armours, gold etc.) from Bangladesh. This is a normal thing after the end of a war. However, there were standoffs in the Western sector between Bengali freedom fighters with the Indian army; one was with a Bengali popularly known as Major Jalil in the Josore front as Bengali freedom fighters opposed the Indian army carry machinery parts over to India. It is not

**Table 5: Showing chronology of events during Bangladesh period**

December 16, 1971	Independence of Bangladesh.
January 10, 1972	Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned from Pakistani jail
January 22, 1972	Bhasani returned from India.
1972	Opposed the India –Bangladesh 25 year treaty.
24th of January, 1973	Government passed two acts. One was called the Collaborator Law and other one the Government Services Law. Bhasani opposed the Collaborator Law.
May 5, 1974	General election was held. Widespread fraud in election was reported. Decision to fast until death
April 8, 1974	Founded the Hukumat-i Rabbani Samiti.
July 4, 1974	Bhasani announced that he was under house arrest
January 1975	Sheikh Mujib formed a new party called BKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League)
August 15, 1975	Mujib along with his family was assassinated. Bhasani was saddened by Mujib's assassination.
February 27, 1976	Wrote to Indra Gandhi to solve the Farrakka problem.
May 16, 1976	Farakka Long March. Three million people suffer from the effects of Farrakka dam, which is declared by the government as a national problem.
November 17, 1976	Bhasani died
1990	The formation of the International Farakka Committee in New York.

Source: Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, (Bengali), (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994); Also Hasan Abdul Quayyum (ed.) Majlum Jananata Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), (in Bengali), (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1988).

As Bhasani arrived in Tangail, many people gathered in front of the circuit house.

He said in a speech. The Awami League government in power is a legitimate government.”

He urged the people of the country to support the government in building the country.<sup>574</sup>

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clear if this was a government policy. For details see “Mujibur Rahman” in Mofizul Islam (ed.) Upmohadesher Rajniti O Baikthito (Politics and Personalities of the Subcontinent), op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>574</sup> Maksud, Mawlana. Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 440.

He then left the town of Tangail for Santosh, surveyed the spot where his house was located and identified where he had kept his few earthly possessions. He was sad at their loss.<sup>575</sup> Eyewitnesses interviewed by Maksud said:

Rows of both Hindu and Muslim followers came and touched the feet of their dear "*hujur*"(*pir*) as if a great man had arrived again, who was the most beloved of dispossessed. He inquired about their whereabouts and their condition. Hearing of the death of some of his followers during the war he could not control his tears."<sup>576</sup>

Bhasani stayed overnight in a house next to his destroyed house. In the house where he temporarily stayed he had no bed to sleep on. He instructed his followers to arrange some straw and to put a bed sheet on it. A rag was also obtained from a neighbour to use as blanket.<sup>577</sup>

Maksud says, "After returning to his independent country for the first time, this great man went to sleep in an improvised bed but with great satisfaction and a peace of mind."<sup>578</sup> It is remarkable that this was a time when many prominent leaders of the AL party were busy taking possessions of abandoned properties of Pakistanis and Beharis. In contrast, Bhasani did not seem to be bothered in sharing the improvised condition at Santosh village with his people. He said, "Never think of yourself as great. It is only God who is great. Destroy your ego, and surrender to God."<sup>579</sup> He also warned Mujib that "If he fails to do his job like the governments of the past, his government will also fail."<sup>580</sup> He practices as we as speaks of lofty ideals of self sacrifice to his spiritual followers and to the political leaders of

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<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., p. 441.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Mohammed Hossain, Bhasanir Bani (Bhasani's messages), (Santosh: Santosh Press, 1973), p. 29

<sup>580</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 441.

the new country. He felt the supreme importance of self sacrifice and self preservation for himself and others. He recommended that his followers struggle with the ego and “false pride” (*nafsányiat*).

Throughout the time from the 1968 mass uprising, followed by the independence war, while the country as a whole became radicalized, even when he had close association with the Communists, surprisingly such influences did not shake his belief in his faith. Mohammed Hossain says:

After independence in February 1972, it was the first *ÍD AL-ADHÁ* Bhasani performed at his Santosh home. On the occasion of *ID*, Muslims put on new clothes, and eat good food. Bhasani did not forget to find some special fresh food for his cows.

To be kind to animals is a virtue practiced by the Prophet and followed by some Sufis. Bhasani was perhaps aware of that and practiced it. Mohammed Hasan also says on the day of *ID*:

Bhasani put on a new cloth presented to him by one of his followers. He took out the *Punjabi* (shirt made for Bengali rural priest), put it under the pillow (a way of ironing clothe in the village). He took a shower with soap and also put *surma* (a kind of collyrium for men) on his eyebrews. After that Bhasani was ready for the *ID* prayer. He led the prayer which he normally does when he is present in Santosh.<sup>581</sup>

Bhasani's impoverished life style of a Bengali rural peasant seems a result of not his destiny but of his choice. After the prayer he gave a short speech: “Those who think God gave us animals to sacrifice for us to eat do not understand anything about Islam. For the satisfaction of Allah, to give away our desires are the meaning of *ID*.” This is a metaphorical interpretation- attention to the “hidden inner meaning” is characteristic of Sufism. Bhasani continued: “Those who have sacrificing mentality are men with character. Those whose

lives are spent for the well being of God's creatures will be accepted on the last day of judgement."<sup>582</sup>

*ID* is a big festival in Santosh. Bhasani's followers contributed animals, spices and other items for cooking food for him. Poor people from all over the area came to eat at Bhasani's invitation. At this time he did not forget to give a piece of very good meat to a dog that was in his house. He felt that as in this country, the dog eats ordinary food everyday; today he also should have special food.<sup>583</sup>

Sufis consider kindness to animals a religious duty. By showing respect to animals, Bhasani was in fact observing his *rubūbiyah* ideas that animals are also God's creations and it is important to be kind to them.<sup>584</sup>

Bangladesh became independent through armed struggle. After the independence it was going through a period of turmoil. Abul Mansur Ahmad narrates important developments in the months following Bangladesh independence. He says that Mujib negotiated with the Indian government for its army to leave Bangladesh. Mujib asked the freedom fighters to surrender their arms. So far so good, but on the 24th of January, 1972 the government passed two acts. One was called the Collaborator Law and the other one the Government Services Law. The AL leaders within a short period of time arrested approximately 30-40 thousand citizens who were put in jail for years without trial. Similar

<sup>581</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari. "Mawlana Bhasanir *ID*" (Mawlana Bhasani's observance of the *ID* Festival), Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 120. (Emphasis added).

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

\*Indeed, there are *Hadits* about the Prophet saying to be kind to animals. It seems that Bhasani was familiar with those *Hadits*. One of them says, "Fear Allah in your treatment of animals."

<sup>584</sup> Irfanul Bari revealed this information to me about Bhasani.

number of people went into hiding in fear of reprisal. The arrested people did not get bail privileges. With a few exceptions no charge sheets were issued.<sup>585</sup>

Mujib had created high expectations in Pakistan times among Bengalis through his six point demand to Pakistanis for Bengalis' democratic rights. Then it seemed Pakistanis were the only obstacle to building a "Golden Bengal." After independence he was expected to deliver what Pakistanis could not. After these laws were passed to punish people who had allegedly collaborated with the Pakistani army, Mujib government classified the whole nation into "patriots" and the "the betrayers" and people who were simply suspects were also put in jail without trial. Consequently, Mujib was going to be seen as an "oppressor" himself.

#### SECTION 1: AL VS. BHASANI'S BANGLADESH NAP

Mujib as a nationalist leader became very popular among Bangladeshis who helped him to come to power in 1970. Bhasani was not interested in coming to power but wanted to be an honest leader. His popularity as a mass leader was a concern to Mujib. Kamal Lohani, who was in charge of the Ministry of Radio and Broadcasting of Bangladesh, records his experience thus:

I was in my office when there was a phone call from *Gonabhavan* (the Prime Minister's office) asking for me. I quickly went to answer the phone. ...As I took the phone, a tough voice said into my ear, "What are you doing? This man just came back to the country, without knowing his motives ...you are writing whatever you want to write. You think he was the one who liberated the country? Stop this type of thing..."<sup>586</sup>

Lohani goes on:

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<sup>585</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Botshar (Fifty Years of Politics As I Observed It), op. cit., pp. 590-591. (Emphasis added)



I was just shocked. ...The point is, the Prime Minister called me because after Mawlana (Bhasani) came back from India there was a commentary on the radio about Bhasani and his role in the democratic movement of the country and in the declaration of the independence.<sup>587</sup>

Despite Bhasani's support for the liberation war, he was viewed by the Mujib government with suspicion. The popularity of Bhasani in the opposition annoyed the Prime Minister who phoned Lohani.

### The India-Bangladesh Treaty

As Bangladesh became an independent country with Indian help, India wanted Bangladesh to sign a treaty with India commonly known as India-Bangladesh Treaty. Bhasani opposed this treaty. Mansur Ahmad observed:

It was on the 19th March that the India -Bangladesh treaty was signed. ...But after the trade pact was signed, the newspaper columnists of this time in Bangladesh started a hue and cry over the issue that 10 miles of the Bangladesh border with India would remain open for trade.<sup>588</sup>

This concerned Bhasani and many other political observers that Bangladesh, a less developed country compared to India, would be at a disadvantage. Indeed, this led to a rampant black market trade. Ahmad says "It did not take the Bangladesh government long to understand this. Within a year the Pact was cancelled, but the organized gang of black marketeers still remained influential in the border areas."<sup>589</sup> In addition to this, the Pact, allowed head quarters of jute, the main export item of Bangladesh, to be transferred to New Delhi. Because of the foreign policy issues, Bangladeshi officials had to have

<sup>586</sup> Kamal Lohani, "Bichitra Charitra Mawlana Bhasani" ("The Controversial Figure") in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

<sup>588</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhekha Rajnitir Ponchas Botshar. (Fifty years of Politics As I Observed It), op. cit., p. 595.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., (Emphasis added)

consent from Indra Gandhi's government to make major decisions in economic matters.

Ahmad says:

After the signing of the treaty, as they saw the negative trends, the Bangladeshi press and political community became alarmed. The relationship on private level, was starting to sour between the two countries. Now the friendship treaty was considered by the opposition as a "document of political domination" and the business treaty was called the "document of economic domination."<sup>590</sup>

This quick signing of deal between India and its junior partner was seen by some in Bangladesh as the beginning of a new Indian domination.<sup>591</sup> Because of these measures AL popularity began to erode. Bhasani condemned the treaties on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1972. The new government, instead of accepting these criticisms, labeled him pro-Pakistani, implying that he was a betrayer to the cause of Bangladesh.

Maksud says that contrary to this allegation, Moshir Rahman, the General Secretary of Bhasani's NAP, who had collaborated with the Pakistan army during the war, was expelled from the party at Bhasani's consent.<sup>592</sup> Bhasani's criticism of the Indian government was seen by the governing party with suspicion. Despite Bhasani's pro-independence stance the government branded him as a turncoat to the national interest.<sup>593</sup> Bhasani reacted to the charge and said in a statement to his critics:

I have not become a new patriot or lover of my country. What I was before, I am still. I have not changed my opinion or my mind. Those who became famous riding on my shoulder have continuously changed their mind and ideology. I have not changed mine.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>590</sup>Ibid., (Emphasis added).

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 447.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., p.447.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

He also said: that even when he criticized the Indian government, he believed that “the friendship between the two peoples should remain cordial.”<sup>595</sup> It should be noted that the AL has always been a rightist party. However, during the liberation war, its association with the leftist elements in India and particularly its pro-Russian stance led it to adapt socialism as one of its ideological objectives. AL also identified nationalism, democracy and secularism as the three other pillars and called it Mujibbad (Mujibism after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) as its goals. Those four principles are in reality a hotpotch of contradictory ideas, outlined in the new constitution.

Maksud says that Bhasani criticized the government because he argued that human rights are not permitted. At this time those leaders who had criticized the AL and its alliance with India were jailed without bail. They were branded along with Bhasani as collaborators of Pakistan. Abdul Matin says that when the nation faced this crisis, Bhasani responded by demanding the government stop arresting people for opposing the government.<sup>596</sup> Bhasani said, “... Stop killing, oppression, and dictatorship.” As resistance against the regime increased, Bhasani’s call made a point. People seem found a leader to oppose Mujib.

#### Bhasani against the AL government’s new measures

During the early years of the Pakistan period, Mujib showed signs of opportunism in politics. When necessary he also created chaos to reach his goal. In 1957 it was primarily Mujib’s opportunistic actions that led Bengali people’s first elected United Front government immediately after taking over power to be dissolved by West Pakistani

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<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> Abdul Matin, “Oithhashik Farakka Long March and Mawlana Bhasani” (The Historic Farakka March and Bhasani’s Role) in Azad Sultan (ed.), Mawlana Bhasani Saranika 91, op. cit., p. 25.

leaders. Unlike Bhasani, Mujib was also known to lack personal honesty as a leader.<sup>597</sup> In the beginning of the liberation war Bhasani left for India, Mujib voluntarily surrendered to the Pakistan army. Bhasani knew Mujib and sometimes distanced himself from his association with him.<sup>598</sup> Bhasani said, "His (Mujib's) politics and my politics are different."<sup>599</sup>

After the independence of Bangladesh, as expected, the Mujib government faced many problems. It is normal for an inexperienced government to make mistakes. But Maksud says:

AL leaders were engaged in nepotism, hijacking, sometimes forcefully occupying properties of innocent people, and that many of them were involved in large scale smuggling of goods from India. The price of many goods, especially rice, (the staple food of Bangladeshi people) doubled the amount from 40 taka a mound to 80 taka within a year.<sup>600</sup>

The government also decided to keep in check other opposition party leaders; they were JSD, Nationalist League (Oli Ahad), East Bengal National Liberation Front (Siraj Sikdar).<sup>601</sup> The government started to show intolerance against those who followed Bhasani. Those who protested against the ruling party's policies were mainly labour leaders, student leaders, and members of the professional unions.

Maksud says that Bhasani seeing the beginning of a food crisis warned of the imminent danger of famine and sternly demanded that the government take initiatives to distribute food. In the face of growing government intolerance, while most political leaders feared reprisals, Bhasani raised his voice as the opposition leader in Bangladesh politics.<sup>602</sup>

<sup>598</sup> Maksud, Bhasani, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>599</sup> Maksud, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid., p. 345-346.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

Now in addition to the government added some local and Indian newspapers to demean Bhasani for taking this stand against the Mujib government labeling him as a “Pro-Pakistani fundamentalist leader.”<sup>603</sup> This is a reference to his religious motifs, with willful misunderstanding of the difference between the role of religion in his politics, and its role and character in states such as Pakistan.

In reply, he held a Press Conference, where he said:

Through disinformation, I have been branded as the enemy of the state, American agent, CIA agent; I was even blamed for conspiring against the independence of Bangladesh. What else could be so pathetic for me at the last stage of my life? Am I alive to hear such false allegations...? I have no patriotism? I challenge the allegations that I am conspiring to destroy the country.<sup>604</sup>

He was misunderstood or misrepresented for his role as a political leader and human rights advocate criticizing the government and its policies. Bhasani insisted that he was not a “pro Pakistani leader”:

To oppose the Pakistan-American military pact, I left my beloved Awami League. I organized anti- American public opinion in every corner of East Bengal [East Pakistan]. How dare they call me the friend of imperialism? ...I only offer this constructive criticism to make the government of the Awami League strong.<sup>605</sup>

In Dhaka, the Polton ground\* was the main place for leaders of the time to speak to people. By this time Mujib was declared as the father of the nation for his contribution to the independence of Bangladesh. Bhasani from his principle did not like it because it is *nafsányiat* but did not object to it either. However, he sensed trouble for Mujib. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1972 Bhasani said:

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<sup>603</sup> The Press Trust of India (PTI) dispatch of dated January 22, 1972. Also in Joyoti Sen Gupta. History of Freedom Movement in Bangladesh, 1974, op. cit., p. 461.

\*Polton ground, a place in the Dhaka city where outdoor political meetings are normally held.

<sup>604</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani., op. cit., p. 447.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

The independence of Bangladesh came at the cost of a huge bloodbath. No particular person or a party could be solely credited for independence. The potter, cobbler, labourer, cultivator, fisherman, middle class, student and the youth gave their blood to make the country independent. The country that became independent at the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of people should not be turned into the property of a political party. There was a little pause, and then he said, "I warn you, by uttering the slogans of democracy while using force, you can not pretend to be democratic. Indeed, those who are guilty of collaborating with Pakistan should be punished. But you can not detain anybody without trial. The People of Bengal (Bangladesh) will not tolerate oppression. If by virtue of possessing power you deny the rights of the destitute people, and then remember, there will be a storm. The storm that is forecast is the storm of revolution. The storm is the sign of the blessing of *Allah*."<sup>606</sup>

In the above, his rethoric was again about his fight for the dispossessed and he is doing it to help them and pledge that God is with him. Bhasani's open opposition for democratic rights of his people caused AL party's further annoyance with him. In the speech, he also defended the rights of Muslim League members, some of whom were detained by the AL for their collaboration with Pakistan. According to Bhasani, if they were not guilty of any crime they should not be detained without trial and should be forgiven for their simple collaboration. This was perhaps one of the reasons that Awami League members saw him as one with the anti independence forces. But to Bhasani, it seems he was defending the human rights of the Muslim League members.<sup>607</sup> There were other reasons for this suspicion. Gaziul Haq records: Independence had come at the expense of great sacrifices. Bhasani alleged that the ruling party had been occupying people's properties in the name of establishing socialism.<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> Gaziul Haq, Akti Ashroy (A Shelter) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.* p. 90.

<sup>607</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 451.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid., p. 449. Also see Gaziul Haq, "Akti Ashroy" (A Shelter) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, pp.89-90.

Bhasani said: "There are many looter associations. This needs change."<sup>609</sup>

Addressing Mujib directly Bhasani said:

Mujib, ...your party workers are illegally trying to own houses, cars, and trying to become the owners of banks. It is your responsibility to stop them. If you fail, your future is going to be miserable. I urge you to let people eat by first stopping these special interest groups in your party. Otherwise you will lose popularity. The people of this country forced the British to leave, and destroyed the Punjabi Pakistani rulers. The revolutionary people of this country will destroy the "anti people", "the looters of properties."<sup>610</sup>

While Bhasani continued to lead the life of a Sufi mystic in improvised conditions in Santosh village, he did not forget his responsibility to warn the special interest groups to stop their unhelpful behaviour. It is true that a powerful section of the ruling party led by Sheikh Moni, Mujib's nephew, AL members were getting unauthorized licenses and permits to import goods and carrying on illegal activities in border areas. As a consequence of this trend, a superficial group of profiteers was created to make profit at the expense of consumers. This also led to the rising costs of essential goods. Bhasani was distressed by this degrading condition. Bhasani said: "This is not socialism. Those leaders of Mujibbad are trying to establish Facism in Bangladesh."<sup>611</sup> He reiterated the need for improvement in law and order for the sake of the "working class."<sup>612</sup>

In Jassore, using examples from Muslim history and Islamic symbols of good and evil, he said: All over the world there has been a struggle going on between Yazid, and

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>611</sup> "Janotar Chabuk, Mawlana Bhasani," (Whip of the Masses, Mawlana Bhasani), (author not mentioned) Souvenir, 1980, p. 25.

<sup>612</sup> Maksud. Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.449.

Namrud's descendants with the destitutes.<sup>613</sup> He continued to view public issues from his religious perspectives and from the instances of Islamic history and characterized the AL as violators of people's interests, similar to the acts by tyrants mentioned in the Quran.

During this time a pro-Mao socialist group, locally known as Naxalites, for their origin in the Naksalbari of West Bengal of India were active in opposing the policies of the government through the destruction of government properties. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Prime Minister took stern measures to stop them. He declared in the National Assembly. "Shoot the Naxalites as soon as you see them. "The Prime Minister was expressing his anger at the group for their destructive means of attempting to topple the government, but Bhasani, emphasizing the importance of the rule of law by the government to punish them said, "You can not shoot as you see him, no one wear the badge of a Naxalite." He expressed disgust at the remarks by the Prime Minister in the national assembly.<sup>614</sup> He asked the Prime Minister to show respect for the democratic process and to use the court of law to punish any crime in the country. Bhasani used constructive criticisms of the government to improve the democratic condition in Bangladesh.

Bhasani showed concern about the way other things were happening in the country as well. The governing party was appointing administrators from AL leadership to the posts of editors for major newspapers in the country. He said "without the full freedom of the press, independence is unthinkable."<sup>615</sup> Another issue that concerned Bhasani was that of the Beharis. Beharis, mentioned earlier, are a group of immigrant

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<sup>613</sup> Beduin Samad, "Sritir Alindae Mawlana Bhasani," (Mawlana Bhasani in My Memory) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>614</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 450.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., p. 451.



Muslims who migrated from Bihar, India in general had supported the Pakistani army and had wanted to keep Pakistan intact. AL members now were treating the whole community as the enemy. In many cases men were killed and many women became the victims of rape by the veterans of the independence movement.<sup>616</sup> Although Bhasani supported the punishment of the Pakistani collaborators who had helped in the killings of Bengalis, he was not happy with the way the Bihari men, women and children were treated and kept in detention camps. Bhasani sternly warned Mujib that: "All non-Bengalis are not collaborators. After proper investigation, punish those who deserve it. But don't punish innocent people just because they are not Bengalis."<sup>617</sup> During this time while most Bengalis hated Beharis, it was a fashion to condemn Beharis. Contrary to the trend, Bhasani's concern was clearly to serve justice to people and not support the oppressive side of nationalist sentiment was significant.

Bhasani reminded the Prime Minister not to take sides. "You are the Prime Minister, not of a section or community but of the whole country."<sup>618</sup> Bhasani advocated the ethical responsibility of being a Prime Minister of a Country. He reminded the leaders to show tolerance and justice for the minorities. He also recommended that the government tolerate opposition. Bhasani's criticisms in post Bangladesh politics were

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid. Also Tahir Mahmoud reports, "the Biharis did not encounter many problems until Mujibur Rahman, founder/president of Bangladesh, emerged on the scene with his rhetoric of Bengali nationalism." "Armed Awami League supporters, their ranks swelled by students and deserters from the army and police, went on a rampage in East Pakistan, in which tens of thousands of non-Bengalis were butchered between January and March 1971. The victims included the Urdu-speaking people (Biharis) as well as officials and their families from West Pakistan. See for details Tahir Mahmoud's review of Loraine Mirza's book "The Heartbreaking Story of the 'Biharis' Stranded in Bangladesh" Internment Camps of Bangladesh, (Markham: Crescent International, 1998), p.172. <<http://www.muslimedia.com/archives/book99/biharbk.htm>> March 22, 2003.

<sup>617</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 479.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

voiced like a political *guru* against the malpractices existing in the newly born country, rather than simply showing an opposition mentality.

The government malpractices became so rampant that Bhasani was urged to take the leadership role. Mansur Ahmad reports "Some members even demanded that Bhasani become the Prime Minister if he can win the election."<sup>619</sup> This seems absurd for Bhasani considering the fact that he was not a politician who wanted to come to power.

In 1973, the government called for an election on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1974. An opposition pact was formed, with Bhasani as the leader. The political parties involved were NAP Bhasani, Bangladesh Jatio League, Bangla Jatio League Oli Ahad, Sromik Krisak Samajbadi Dal, and the Banglar Communist Party.<sup>620</sup> The party in power was in alliance with Pro-Russian, Pro- Indian groups. Bhasani's NAP alliance was aligned with the pro-Chinese Communist party and labour unions. Thus allegations against Bhasani continued. <sup>621</sup>Khoka Roy of Bangladesher Communist Party (pro-Russian) wrote:

Under the above circumstances some reactionary forces, especially Mawlana Bhasani and his anti-India and Soviet circle, by circulating false claims are trying to destroy the Soviet, India and Bangladesh Peace Treaty. It is certain that if the Peace Treaty is destroyed, it will open the door to America-Maoist Chinese leadership. Mawlana Bhasani wants just this. <sup>622</sup>

On the issue of forming an opposition Pact under Bhasani's leadership Khoka Ray further wrote:

Of course there have been attempts to form an alliance with Bhasani as the leader. But the policy Mawlana is following is reactionary. There are such

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<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 609.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 458.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.357-58.

<sup>622</sup> Khoka Roy quoted in Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

undesirable elements that if power through election is transferred to them, instead of improvement, there will be disaster in the country.<sup>623</sup>

Bhasani was playing an important role as the leader of the opposition. However, when the election campaign was at its climax, he lost interest in the election. Suddenly, he refrained from campaigning.<sup>624</sup> This time, his sudden loss of enthusiasm did not help the opposition pact to campaign for popularity. Maksud thinks: "This might have been because as Bhasani's sudden realization that the AL should be given more time to be in power. There should be a stable government, with Mujib as the leader."<sup>625</sup> Oli Ahad complained that "Bhasani stayed in hospital just before the election to support Mujib. In the mean time, the Prime Minister (Mujib) took the opportunity to visit Bhasani in the hospital more than once...."<sup>626</sup>

Indeed, when the election campaign was at its climax, around the later part of February, Bhasani said his health was not well. On February 28<sup>th</sup> he was admitted to the P.G. hospital. The next day the Prime Minister of the country visited the hospital and sat beside Bhasani. They discussed the political condition in the country. The Prime Minister brought treats for Bhasani and also instructed the doctors so that there is no problem in his care.<sup>627</sup>

On May 5<sup>th</sup> just two days before the election, even though the Prime Minister was extremely busy, he visited Bhasani along with his wife. This time they also discussed both national and international problems. The wives of the leaders had "cordial

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<sup>623</sup> Quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamd Khan Bhasani, p. 462.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

discussions". Bhasani blessed Mujib by touching his head and Mrs Bhasani said, "I am praying for you."<sup>628</sup>

It seems that despite Bhasani's displeasures with Mujib's rule, (like Ayub in the early Pakistan period), Bhasani also allowed Mujib time to try to be a just ruler. The Prime Minister took the advantage of Bhasani's sincere encouragement.

Bhasani as the head of the opposition, blessing the Prime Minister just before the election, annoyed Bhasani's candidates and supporters because he did not participate in the election campaign and on top of that, as the head of the opposition blessing the Prime Minister for success. The whole drama was advertised widely in the media. According to Maksud, this had a negative influence on the opposition candidates in the election.<sup>629</sup>

The election was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1974. During the election, there were reports of wide- spread fraud. Out of 300 seats, the AL won all but 11. This means that 97.3% seats were captured by the AL. All of the disputed seats were declared as won by the AL without investigation.<sup>630</sup> After the election, Bhasani condemned the lack of fairness in the election. To everyone's surprise, the day after the election, the Prime Minister declared that the election result shows there is no opposition party.<sup>631</sup>

After staying in hospital until March 13<sup>th</sup> Bhasani left for Santosh. Oli Ahad commented: "... In this election the role of Bhasani, if not directly but indirectly helped the government in power to be reelected."<sup>632</sup> Maksud observes that, logically for Bhasani in the newly independent, war –torn country, at least for a while, there should be a stable

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<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*, p.460. (Emphasis added).

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464

government, with Sheikh Mujib as the leader. Bhasani's role was also to keep Mujib under pressure for not abusing power.<sup>633</sup>

It seems Bhasani deliberately wanted Mujib to be reelected so that he could be in power for sometime and thus organize the institutions and the infrastructure of the country. This instance of Bhasani's patience to give the government more time seems contrary to the characterization of Bhasani that he was always "destructive in politics", or always possessed the "opposition mentality." For the sake of the betterment of the country, Bhasani seem to have taken a pragmatic approach to have constitutional democracy established in Bangladesh.

Despite Bhasani's unusual show of patience with the new government, its continued undemocratic measures frustrated him. After the election, Ataur Rahman, a vatern leader of the country, was chosen by the opposition groups as the leader of the opposition, but the government did not accept him. Mansur Ahmad says: "It had been 9 months and two sessions had passed but there was no opposition leader. This was rare in a parliamentary system."<sup>634</sup>

Bhasani started to lose his patience with the AL also because of its increased repressive measures especially after the election. There were a great numbers of secret killings as a result of the government measures. According to one account by the Daily Bangladesh Observer, from 1972 January to April 1973 alone, 4, 995 people died from

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<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464

<sup>634</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Ponchas Botshar (Fifty Years of Politics As I Observed It)*, *op. cit.*, p. 610.

secret killings. Within this number political killings were 2,035, there were 337 women kidnapped and 190 raped.<sup>635</sup>

Sixty police stations were reported attacked and looted. There was also much destruction of government property from fire. During the later part of 1974, four thousand AL leader and workers were killed and opposition leader and workers, especially of JSD members in the northern and southwestern part of Bangladesh, were also killed in the thousands allegedly by the ruling government.<sup>636</sup> It looks like the country was going through civil war. Maksud says, the allegation was that *Rakhi Bahini*, (paramilitary defense forces of the AL), was responsible for the massacres of opposition members and that, due to AL rule, law and order also deteriorated to its lowest.<sup>637</sup> Opposition leaders, seeing no way to tackle the AL in the National Assembly (to stop its lawlessness, nepotism and widespread corruption), took to the street. Bhasani, having shown leniency to the governing party in the election, now felt betrayed. The rise in food price and the scarcity of food concerned Bhasani.

#### Decision to Fast until Death

In a meeting held on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1974 in Santosh, Mawlana (Bhasani) declared that at the head office of the NAP in Dhaka from the 15<sup>th</sup> he would start his fast until death.<sup>638</sup> Maksud records: on May 14<sup>th</sup> at a speech at the Palton ground he specifically proposed three points. They were:

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<sup>635</sup> The Bangladesh Observer, 7 July, 1973. Also Maksud. Mawlana Abdul Hamd Khan Bhasani, op. cit, pp. 487-488.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid., p.457.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., p.488.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid., p.468.

1. Government to take measures to reduce prices of food, clothing, and essential goods.
2. Government to stop repressive measures.
3. Government to stop anarchy in factories, businesses, jobs, and in public life, and to take measures to bring public safety.

During this time, people in the thousands, irrespective of party affiliation, came to visit him. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, the Prime Minister, with his consignment of ministers, also came to visit Bhasani and requested that he break his fast. Bhasani replied that the Prime Minister's request would be considered. But he did not break fast. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May his condition started to deteriorate because of his continued fasting. Intellectuals of all ranks, including Jasimuddin (the internationally famous artist of Bangladesh), went to see him personally to ask him to break fast.<sup>639</sup> Maksud notes, that in that the General Secretary of NAP, Kazi Jaffer, in a press conference said: "The proletariat leader's condition is deteriorating alarmingly. Bhasani and his party members do not want personal visits or good wishes but want the three conditions fulfilled."<sup>640</sup>

Bhasani's fasting strategy was strengthening the opposition. Sheikh Mujib's government responded with a show of strength arresting more leaders and workers of the opposition. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1974 a meeting organized by the NAP was attacked and the podium destroyed by the pro-government forces.<sup>641</sup>

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, at the request of his followers and well wishers, Bhasani broke fast. This was after fasting for 180 hours over 8 days. At 8 p.m. he broke fast by taking food

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<sup>639</sup> Ibid., p. 469.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid., p. 471

from a Hindu push cart laborer named Moloy Sarkar.<sup>642</sup> This reflects Bhasani's desire to be with the poor and the minorities.

Maksud says that Bhasani's fasting did not go in vain. It helped the NAP to reorganize itself. With this act the opposition built momentum. After Bhasani broke fast, the environment of uncertainty led to the price of essential commodities to go up. There were signs of the beginning of a famine. This would be known as the famine of 1974.

Maksud says that the relationship between the government and the opposition groups started to deteriorate further. One party was involved in viciously criticizing the other.<sup>643</sup>

During this time, Bhasani was also concerned about the government's decision to print its currency in the Indian security press. He thought it would cause further inflation. Based on his criticisms of India, those Indian newspapers that had always appreciated his role in politics, started criticizing him openly now.<sup>644</sup> The criticism was especially strong in the weekly *Jugantar* (from Calcutta). It characterized Bhasani as being "dishonest, ungrateful, communal minded and an Indian enemy." The paper had a series of articles criticizing him to support these allegations.<sup>645</sup> Bhasani was aware of the allegations against him and was saddened by these claims. He said:

If the lies that were published in the *Jugantar* Patrica continue, there will develop a poisonous relationship and the brotherly and friendly relationship between the two countries will deteriorate. I hope that in future the Indian newspapers will stop propagating such false allegations.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471. (Emphasis added).

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476-477.

<sup>645</sup> Ahmad Safa in *the Daily Ganakonta*, August 5, 1973, *op. cit.*, p.480. I have interviewed Ahmad Safa an eminent scholar and writer of Bangladesh on this issue at his residence in Dhaka in June 1995 revealed similar informations. (Ahmad Safa recently passed away).

<sup>646</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, p. 478.



Even earlier, on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1973, Ahmad Safa, an eminent Bangladeshi scholar, in a sub editorial of the Daily Gonakhanta pointed out the Hindustan Standard's editorial cartoon of Bhasani: while showed Bhasani losing control of his *Lungi* (his cloth) and as a naked person hiding behind a tree. This refers to AL government's sole dependence on the import of clothe from India. Ahmad Safa also cites Ananda Bazar Patrika, in its editorial column, declaring Mawlana "a betrayer." The newspaper editorial made dehumanizing comments about his cap and beard and said "In Bangladesh this Mawlana is bringing communalism." To Ahmad Safa these are false claims.<sup>647</sup> Nirmol Sen wrote of the Indian sentiment of this time:

I went to New Delhi to attend the 'Undivided Asia Conference' in 1973. In the conference, the Mawlana was continuously protesting the unequal treaties between India and Bangladesh. Then the Indian reporters asked him 'Mawlana why have you become so anti-Indian?' They tried to identify him as a communal minded leader. I said, 'Slow down friends. Slow down! If you want to say some thing about the Mawlana you have to turn the pages of history. In 1956-57 Mawlana raised gates honoring Bidhan Roy and Desho Bondu Chittaranjon Das. Then he was labeled as an "Indian agent." And those who labeled him came to India during the liberation war even before Bhasani arrived." The questions by the reporters of New Delhi after this did not go far.<sup>648</sup>

In Bangladesh, Bhasani continued attacking the government on corruption charges. However, it did not bring government reforms. But in January 1975 Sheikh Mujib formed a new political party called BKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League) with Awami League, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Russia), and National Awami Party (Muzzafar).

...the Constitution was amended to make Mujib president for five years and to give him full executive powers. The next month, in a move that wiped out all opposition political parties, Mujib proclaimed Bangladesh a one-party state,

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<sup>647</sup> Ahmad Safa in the Daily Gonokhonto, August 5th 1973. Also in Maksud's Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 482.

<sup>648</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 483.

effectively abolishing the parliamentary system. He renamed the Awami League the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (Bangladesh Peasants, Workers, and People's League) and required all civilian government personnel to join the party. The fundamental rights enumerated in the Constitution ceased to be observed, and Bangladesh, in its infancy, was transformed into a personal dictatorship.<sup>649</sup>

Bhasani's criticism of the government offended Moni Singh, a leading member of BKSAL. He said he would "destroy Bhasani, cut him into pieces and remove him from the land of Bengal."<sup>650</sup> It was a similar threatening statement made by Iskander Mirza, the then Governor of East Pakistan, that Mirza would shoot Bhasani as soon as he returns from abroad.

Bhasani was sad to hear such dehumanizing remark from Moni Singh and in reply he said:

...one of the party alliance leaders, Sri Moni Singh, on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, said with full force that he will cut me into pieces and remove me from the land of Bengal. I will not have any place to rest in the land of Bengal. This Hitler like declaration was made in front of you (Mujib) and expected your collaboration. You did not protest. Rather, you remained silent or helpless or gave him your permission to take action against me.<sup>651</sup>

It seems that to be in opposition was a risky job, especially after such threats. In 1974 he was already 89 years old. Bhasani became increasingly frustrated at the state of affairs in the country under AL rule. He was disappointed with the way things were happening and with the moral decay in the governing party. He also felt that his deteriorating health did not allow him to organize the NAP. As a result, he decided to quit politics.

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<sup>649</sup> Library of Congress Country Studies, "Bangladesh", <<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@fie>> June 10, 2003.

<sup>650</sup> Engineer Abul Hossain, "Ak Nazare Mawlana Bhasanir Jiboni, (Bhasani's life at a Look", in Bhasani Sharane (Bhasani Souvenir), (Santosh: Mawlana Bhasani Mazar and Masjid Management Committee, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>651</sup> Moni Singh quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 473.

### Founding the *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* Society

From 1973 onward, Bhasani would say that he was going to retire from party politics. During this time, many prominent political leaders of his party such as Kazi Jaffer, Rashed Khan Menon, and Haider Akber Khan Rono left the NAP Party and the NAP started to weaken.

Bhasani now realized that the problem of the country was a lack of morality in politics, a distinctively Sufi concern. On April 8, 1974 he formed the nonpolitical religious *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* Samity (Party). The aim of the party was to teach people the spiritual aspects of the *Rubúbiyah* philosophy. He now spent most of his time in the *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* Samity in Santosh.<sup>652</sup> When asked what is *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* Samity, he said:

I have realized that it doesn't matter how many times we have changes in the government; there will be no good result without any change in the character of the administration. If the rulers possess good character, only then the country will move toward progressive change.<sup>653</sup>

To this end Bhasani established *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* Samity. Bhasani's understanding of a good society is based on his Sufi understanding of being honest. He realized the deteriorating moral decay of leaders and believed that the remedy was through change in the character. This is an indication of his prescription of how to get rid of the *Nafsányiat* (destruction of the ego) of the rulers, which is according to Sufi doctrine, a progressive, long process that is never really completed. Thus, *Hukumat-Rabbáni* as opposed to "*nafsani*" implies a progressive purification, a process, rather than revolution or imposition of "Islamic rule" from the above through "Islamic Law" (as

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<sup>652</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 483.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., p.484.

in Pakistan). Although there were political themes in the ideas of Bhasani's *Rabbáni* Party, it was primarily a humanitarian and a reformist organization. Thus, *Hukumat-i Rabbáni* seems to be his normal spiritual concerns to bring changes in Bangladesh politics.

Bhasani formed the new non-political party to serve people in his retirement. However, his retirement did not last long. On June 8<sup>th</sup> 1974, police searched for materials in his house and took important papers of the *Rabbáni* Party. Bhasani expressed his dismay at the government actions.<sup>654</sup>

Bhasani wrote in a pamphlet in January 1974:

I have said several times to the Prime Minister and his ministers through the newspapers that most of you are my former associates. Neutral observers will be compelled to say that what is happening in today's Bangladesh, with *Mujib Bahini*, (*Mujib's paramilitary force*) *Rakhi Bahini* (*the paramilitary defense force*), *Volunteer Bahini* (*the volunteer force*), M. P.'s, party leaders, there is much more oppression, injustice, corruption, nepotism, and anti-state and anti-social activities than in the former governments of Pakistan. Those who preached honesty in politics are now practicing the opposite. You are absorbed in making money and abusing power. ...<sup>655</sup>

While Bhasani's call was the destruction of the ego, the AL government glorified its leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the status of a king. Like Mussolini in Italian fascism the AL asked Bengalis to imitate the dress code of Mujib. In the style of fascism the government also started its different brigades of para military forces. They became active to keep the opposition under control. There was already *Mujib Bahini*, led by Mujib's nephew, Sheikh Moni. Later *Lal Bahini* under Abdul Mannan, and for Mujib's personal security, *Rakkhi Bahini*, headed by the Indian army came into existence. Government banned all the newspapers, except *Ittifaq* which was government controlled.

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<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, p.485 (Emphasis added).

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 472-473.

Bengali nationalism was declared as one of the most important goals of the nation to be promoted. During the state of emergency, the police and court system were also made obsolete. In its place, the AL and its forces started to rule the country by the order of its leaders and their use of force. Opposition leadership was crushed by random arrests.<sup>656</sup> Mujib laid down extra-ordinary paradoxes and contradictions behind his rhetoric of Mujibbad.

The *Hukumatui Rabbáni* Samity organized a public meeting on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1974 at the Polton ground. At the meeting Bhasani said with a sad voice:

I do not wish to live anymore. Most of my friends and colleagues have passed away. I am alive to see the suffering of human beings, *Ashraful Mominin* (the best creature of God). Now I want to see that Bengali Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian will have happiness. ...<sup>657</sup>

Bhasani was referring to the famine and the continuous suffering it caused. He was sad at the suffering of human beings, the creations of God. Bhasani recommended to Mujib that:

It is not possible for you alone to face ...the problem we have in front of us, Mujib, release all the political prisoners. Withdraw all the warrants. Sit with the leaders of the opposition. Put all your energy into saving human beings....<sup>658</sup>

Bhasani with his *rubúbiyah* vision seem to be progressive in his thinking to preach the welfare of all people. He was ready to sit with the government to find a solution to the famine problem.

Maksud says that, unlike the other famines in Bengal, this was not the result of a food shortage. There was plenty of food in stock.<sup>659</sup> Steve Ramer of National Geographic

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<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 464-467. (Emphasis added)

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473. (Emphasis added)

<sup>659</sup> Steve Ramer, "Bangladesh reports" in *the National Geographic*, July 1975.

reported that even during the time of the famine in Bangladesh there was 40 hundred thousand tons of rice in store which was one third of a year's requirement.<sup>660</sup>

It is important to note that within three years of Bangladesh's independence, it had received aid valued at two hundred crores from foreign countries, but Bangladeshis died of starvation. The government characterized it as a temporary problem. As soon as foreign aid arrived it was smuggled out to interested quarters. This was blamed on widespread smuggling and hoarding by AL leaders and their host Indian merchant class.<sup>661</sup> Government tried to take some measures. It opened 5,662 temporary kitchens to help the poor. They did not solve the problem and the unrest continued.<sup>662</sup>

The government of Mujib took more dramatic actions in other areas. Most prominent politicians and intellectuals were firmly urged and often intimidated to join the newly formed BKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League) party. Bhasani and many others declined. Mujib, in order to please Bhasani, went to Santosh to inaugurate the newly founded Mawlana Mohammed Ali College as a government- financed special college. Bhasani allowed him to do this but still did not join BKSAL. Maksud says: "On March 7<sup>th</sup> 1975 in Santosh after the opening of the college, they had cordial discussions."<sup>663</sup> In the words of Kader Siddiqui:

...pointing his finger toward Bangabandu [Mujib] he said: Mujibor (Mujib) you are ...not the son of ... a millionaire, you are from a not so well to do family. No police or police inspector could save you. In the past, only the common people saved you. Keep that in mind when thinking about the downtrodden.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 473.

<sup>661</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-467.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., p. 492.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

Bhasani told Mujib that while in power people become corrupt but only honesty and pro people politics can save leaders from danger. As a senior politician Bhasani was visited at Santosh by politicians and people of different orientations and interests and he seemed to know that Mujib was going to be in trouble, and he cautioned Mujib.

In June 1975 Bhasani was first put under house arrest. On July 1<sup>st</sup> there was a call by the opposition for a strike all over the city in protest against the arrest. However, on July 2<sup>nd</sup> the Home Minister Monsur Ali said: "He was not arrested but in order to maintain security he was put under police protection."<sup>665</sup> However, on 4<sup>th</sup> July, Bhasani announced in a press release that "I am under house arrest." Throughout the famine, Bhasani was kept under house arrest in his Santosh home.<sup>666</sup>

During this time a consistent government strategy was also to continuously label Bhasani as a "communal minded" leader. Bhasani was saddened by this and in reaction he gave details of his activities during his political career:

By falsely branding me as communal -minded person they keep me under arrest. For my noncommunal role, they called me "the agent of India." In my life I have been through so many abuses. Today they propagate that I am communal minded but when I was the president of the Awami League party, I had five Hindus chosen as ministers who are: Monoranjon Dhar, Dharendra Dhatta, Kamini Kumar Datta, Basanta Kumar Das and one Sutra Dhar.<sup>667</sup>

Bhasani continued:

Our struggle is not communal minded. It is a struggle by the oppressed against the oppressors (*za'lim*). That oppressor might be a Hindu, or a Muslim, or from any community or group. It is against them. And in this if there is an obstacle or suffering, I am ready to accept it, I am even ready to be a martyr at the hands of Mujib's *Lal Bahini*. I will fight for the truth until I die.<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 490.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, p.476.

<sup>667</sup> *The Weekly Haq Khota*, May 12, 1972.

<sup>668</sup> Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, op. cit., p. 464.

Bhasani's weekly *Haq Khota* was also closed by the government. At this time of his political career as an elderly statesman he suggests examples from history to prove his point:

Even though the mouthpiece of the exploited people, the Weekly *Haq Khota* was closed, our genuine struggle could not be stopped. On the other hand, *Inshaallah* (by the grace of God) it will become powerful. Whatever the government says about democracy, when the weekly *Haq Khota* is closed, the people in general will understand that there is no trace of democracy in the country. During the time of the Muslim League some of the newspapers that were critical of the government actions (for various government restrictions) were forced to close their offices. Only the weekly *Ittifaq* the mouthpiece of the Awami League remained circulating due to great effort by my party. Our party, the Awami League, had many opposing newspapers in Bengali, Urdu and English but despite that Liaquat Ali Khan and the Nurul Amin government could not stop. The more oppressive the government became, the more popular the Awami League became.<sup>669</sup>

Bhasani felt that such actions during the early period of Pakistan ruined it. Now, in the beginning period of Bangladesh, it would not be wise for Bangladeshi leaders to take oppressive measures against the opposition. As an experienced politician, Bhasani knew about the consequences of being oppressive to the opposition and warned the government about its outcomes. Syed Jaffer says:

The public was restricted from meeting Bhasani. In front of his house, there were regular police and police detectives. Police were stationed all around his house. Only a selected number of people were allowed to enter. ...

As I wanted to go in, a plain dress policeman asked my identity and my place of destination as well as my profession...I said my aim is to say *salam* (hello) to *Hujur*(Bhasani). The police clearly said "no outsider is permitted to go inside..." I was waiting for two hours, and after a while the Mawlana came out ... I saw him addressing the police officers. He was saying something. ...I tried to go as close as possible. What I heard him saying is:

'You have arrested me in such a way that I have to use my own income to eat. If I was in jail, the government would pay to feed me. Mujib's government has filled the jails with political leaders. That is why he has kept me under arrest at home. But how shameless are they, to put the police in front of the kitchen of a

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<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 478-79.(Emphasis added).



Muslim family requiring some privacy?’ The police officers were quiet. They were listening to what he was saying but with a face as if they were drinking poison.<sup>670</sup>

During this time, the Prime Minister and other Ministers often visited him in Santosh bringing gifts.<sup>671</sup> However, in banning newspapers, banning political parties and arresting opposition leaders, Mujib was slowly developing in this a closed society which went against Bhasani’s support for democracy, fairness, and honesty in politics. Bhasani remained under house arrest from the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1975 until 15<sup>th</sup> August 1975 when Mujib was assassinated. Sheikh Mujib’s nephew, Fazlul Haq Moni, who had been behind the scenes directing the oppressive measures, was also killed along with his wife in their own house.

#### The Military Coup

On August 15<sup>th</sup> 1975, some junior officers of the army staged a coup with about 300 solders. Sheikh Mujib was assassinated in his Dhanmondi residence in Dhaka with his entire family, including his wife, his three children and their wives and many relatives where they had gathered in the house for a family occasion. One of the plotters, Mostaque Ahmed was the most trusted Minister of Mujib. Mujib had instructed his children to depend on him in his absence. Two of his daughters who were abroad at the time remained alive. They were shocked to hear Mostaque Ahmed as one of the plotters of the coup. It was as if like the tragic end of a drama with the death of Bengali peoples’ most popular nationalist hero in a matter of only four years of his rule after the liberation.

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<sup>670</sup> Syed Jaffer, “Mawlana Bhasanike Je Vaavee Ameer Dakechce” (Mawlana Bhasani: The way I saw him), in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu’im Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., pp. 235-236.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

<sup>672</sup> “By the time of his assassination, Mujib's popularity had fallen precipitously, and his death was lamented by surprisingly few.” <sup>673</sup>

Bhasani was stunned by hearing the news that Mujib was killed. He asked that someone bring him a transistor radio. <sup>674</sup> Maksud records it from the description of a person present at the time:

After this he went, inside the mosque. Approximately an hour later he came out ... his eyes were wet in tears. He said: “everything is over. ...” He was counting the *Tasbīh* (the prayer-beads) rapidly. He had tears continuously flowing from his eyes. I understood how much he had loved Sheikh Mujib. I realized that he prayed for [him]. <sup>675</sup>

After the coup, while most leaders of the country and a large section of the population were joyous, celebrating the death of their once hero turned a dictator, Bhasani was visibly sad. He was sad because Mujib was his long time companion. He has been angry with him for the authoritarian rule he imposed over the young nation but never expected him to be killed with his entire family. <sup>676</sup>

Mostaque Ahmad, the newly chosen president, went to Bhasani in Santosh for his support of the new regime. General Osmani, the former chief of the staff during the time of liberation, who worked with Mujib but was also not happy with his rule, visited Bhasani to seek a statement supporting the new government. Bhasani declined both of

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<sup>672</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>673</sup> Library of Congress Country Studies, “Bangladesh,” <<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@fie>>

<sup>674</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 514.

<sup>675</sup> This is from the statement of a person present at the time, recorded by Maksud. See Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 514.

<sup>676</sup> Irfranul Bari said to me Bhasani often said he treated Mujib like a son and sometime his food was supplied by Mujib's wife, personally delivered by Mujib's elder son Sheikh Kamal.

them. Maksud says: "He was not in favor of solving problem through murder."<sup>677</sup> He showed humanism and respect for life.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October the President, in a radio and TV address to the nation, declared that in February 1977 there would be general election. He promised to release of all the political prisoners, and said that he would allow the freedom of the Press. Bhasani now thanked the President for his promises.<sup>678</sup> About democratic struggle of the people Bhasani said: "People of this country have been fighting to establish democratic rights. The path of democracy is through constructive means. Democracy can not be established through hatred and terrorism...."<sup>679</sup>

In this role he served as an institution and an umbrella to other politicians as well. When Mujib was using ultra nationalism and violating democratic rights, to gain more power, *nafsányiat* Bhasani opposed him. To Bhasani it seems Mujib strayed away from Bhasani's path of honesty and the sacrifice of the ego. To him a belief in *Huqúq al 'ibád*, a leader as a 'server' can save a leader from destruction than possessing more and more power. Despite the end of Mujib's rule the young nation could not get over the course of anarchy. In this Bhasani's politics of honesty and fairness remained only as an ideal to the nation.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 514. (Emphasis added).

<sup>678</sup> Ibid., p. 514.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid., p. 519.

<sup>680</sup> Bhasani advised Ziaur Rahman (who subsequently became the President of Bangladesh and brought law and order and restored democracy in the country "to keep in touch with people and look after their problems." He also advised Zia not to criticize Mujib. Zia abstained from criticizing Mujib. After Bhasani's death President Zia's newly organized Political Party BNP absorbed most of Bhasani's followers. For details see Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.518.

## SECTION 2: BHASANI'S FARAKKA MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH AND ABROAD

Farakka is the name of a place in Murshidabad of West Bengal in India where India built a huge dam over the Ganges River. (See appendix E) It is ten miles from Rajshahi, Bangladesh. India planned to build this dam during the Pakistan period but Pakistani opposition to this project did not allow it to be completed. However, starting from anti Ayub movement and mass uprising in the then called East Pakistan; from 1969 through the period of the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 India completed the project. After its completion, in 1971, India wanted Mujib to sign an agreement to jointly open the dam. People in Bangladesh were shocked to hear the news that the Ganges had been dammed. Under pressure from India however, a deal was signed between India and Bangladesh. Mujib government was also invited to ceremonially open the dam. Soon after the opening of the dam, water supply in the tributaries of the Ganges in Bangladesh started to dry up during the dry season, resulting in damage to crops in eight districts of Bangladesh. As a result of this huge shortage of water, salinity problem developed in the coastal region and fishing was also greatly hampered. This situation alone increased the anti-Mujib sentiment in Bangladesh.

Bhasani knew about the Farakka dam project even during the Pakistan time. He was also shocked at the news of its completion in 1972.<sup>681</sup> Its inauguration from the Bangladeshi side, represented by the government, was seen by Bangladeshis as a betrayal by the Mujib government. However, in the “Ganges sharing of Water treaty” between Bangladesh and India, it was agreed by the two countries to share the water.

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<sup>681</sup> Abdul Matin, “Ouitihashik Farakka Long March and Mawlana Bhasani” (The Historic Farakka March and Bhasani’s Role), in Azad Sultan (ed.) Mawlana Bhasani, Saranika 91, op. cit., p. 32.

After the cruel death of Mujib, Indian antagonism towards Bangladesh suddenly increased. Indian actions showed as if they had lost a trusted friend. Now India followed the principle of systematically withdrawing water from Bangladesh with the effect that during the dry season of 1976, for the first time, there was a serious water shortage in the western part of Bangladesh.<sup>682</sup> Maksud notes that water from the different rivers that originate in Nepal and flow through India was blocked as it entered Bangladesh. As a consequence, many small hydro-electric power plants in Bangladesh had to be closed. The dam was released during rainy season causing artificial flood in the region and during dry season a little water is released causing crop failure and the lack of fisheries product in the area. (See appendix E). There are reports of chronic famine and death as a result of dam.<sup>683</sup> It is clear that these famines are not normal but man-made.

#### 1976 Farakka March

When Bhasani first heard the news of the water shortage for irrigation and fisheries, he was sick in the P.G. hospital in Dhaka. By now Bhasani was in his 90's and was old, sick and frail but he was shocked at hearing the news of the man-made famine in the western part of Bangladesh. First he wrote to Indra Gandhi the then Prime Minister of India. Among many other things, he wrote Farakka Dam is: "India's aggressive designs to establish undivided India." He also wrote, "We want our friendship to continue for ever. We are always prepared to help in your problems and expect the same from you

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<sup>682</sup> Abid S. Bahar "Muktijudder Estobir O Gotishil Chatona O Farakka Somasha" (The Static vs Dynamic Consciousness of the Freedom Movement and the Farakka Problem), Weekly Robbar (ID Issue), (Dhaka: New Nation Printing Press, 1996), pp. 207-208.

<sup>683</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., pp. 529-530.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

Indra Gandhi replied:

It is difficult to imagine that a person who fought shoulder to shoulder with us in the struggle against colonial rule and subsequently shared the sorrows and sacrifices for Bangladesh's own national liberation should now have so seriously misunderstood us and even questioned our sincerity of purpose. I prefer to believe that your public statement about India's aggressive designs to establish undivided India and the threat to lead a march to "demolish" Farakka were made in the heat of the movement."<sup>685</sup>

In reply Bhasani wrote:

Your letter of May 4, 1976 is but a repetition of the official version on the Farakka issue which I did not expect from you as a grand daughter of Motilal Nehru and daughter of Pandit Jawharlal Nehru, your illustrious ancestors. You yourself always fought to establish the democratic rights of deprived people, ensuing justice in all spheres...

About Farakka, I repeat my request to you to visit the northern districts of Bangladesh and assess the extent of the damage caused to our agricultural and industrial production. I would urge you not to depend solely on the reports of your officials...

If my request is not accepted by you I shall be compelled to formulate a future programme to solve the problem, following the path of struggle I have learnt from your forefathers and Mahatma Gandhi, the leaders of the oppressed people.

Assuring you of my best cooperation in solving this crucial problem and to strengthen the friendly ties between our two countries,

I remain.<sup>686</sup>

Bhasani sincerely acknowledged that he had learnt many things from Motilal Nehru and Mohatma Gandhi. But Bhasani thought the formal reply was lacking sincerity by the Indian government. He was not happy at the reply and decided to go ahead with the plan. Bhasani, an experienced politician, saw it as "India's water aggression." He declared on April 18<sup>th</sup> of 1976 that if India fails to share Ganges water with Bangladesh,

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<sup>685</sup> Quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, pp. 530-531.

on 16<sup>th</sup> May the same year there will be a long march from Rajshahi to the site of Farakka. There was no reply from Indra anymore. Soon volunteers started to organize.

This was the last year of his life. He was 91 years old. Abdul Matin says “He (Bhasani) was acting as if he were a young man of 25. The leader stood up from bed, started to stroll around and said with a lively voice “Matin, I will do *jihad* to destroy the Farakka dam. You will be with me. Will you support me on this?” I said, “I will give my time and energy to your service.”<sup>687</sup> Alhaj Shamsul Huda records Bhasani’s analysis of the Farakka movement. “Look, I have declared *jihad* against Farakka. I want all of you to help me on this. ... to get a normal water supply for Bangladesh through the Ganges, otherwise, I will march there with thousands of people to destroy it.”<sup>688</sup>

Here Bhasani’s use of religious vocabulary *jihad*, is not to mean in any communal sense but in the struggle against Indian dam that he characterized as “water aggression.”

Bhasani discussed this matter with his other colleagues and took a decision. He announced on April 18<sup>th</sup> that he would lead a march to India’s Farakka and a 31 member Farakka committee was formed. The 16th of May was chosen as the date to begin the march. The news was circulated in Bangladesh and abroad that Bhasani would lead a march to Farakka. The slogan, “Let’s go, lets go, lets go to Farakka” soon became popular in Bangladesh.

In the 64 mile long march people came from all over Bangladesh to join him in Rajshahi. The Indian government in the meantime stationed a huge army at the border to

<sup>686</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 531.

<sup>687</sup> Abdul Matin, “Oitihahik Farakka Long March and Mawlana Bhasani” (The Historic Farakka March and Bhasani’s Role), in Azad Sultan (ed.) Mawlana Bhasani Saranika 91, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

stop Bhasani from crossing the border. On May 16th the Farakka long march came to a halt in Rajshahi, not far from the Farakka dam.<sup>689</sup>

Enayet Ullah Khan, editor of the *Weekly Holiday* was with Bhasani described the situation:

I take pride in being a part of the vanguard of the March, holding the Mawlana, frail then, through several stretches in the 48-mile route in pouring rain from Rajshahi town to Shibganj, the terminus, some one and a half mile inside the Bangladesh land border with India. Closest to the no man's land, is Kanshat, from where the forward team could view the arena of Plassey where the last of the Bangladesh sovereigns, Nawab Sirajuddowla, made his last journey on boat amid the betrayals of Mirzafar and Umichand in the battle with Robert Clive, the British mercantile colonialist. The unmonumental structure of the Farakka dam spanning the Ganges, upstream of lower riparian Bangladesh, looked forbidding with Indian forces mobilised there in battle-ready gear.<sup>690</sup>

Abdul Matin who was one of the organizers of the Farakka programme wrote" ..., Kazi Jaffer and other leaders of the NAP were asking the gathered crowd to calm down and keep discipline. Suddenly there was a big applause, and slogan: "Mawlana Bhasani *zindabad*", ("Long live Master Bhasani"), "destroy the death trap Farakka", and "Down with India." From the crowd Bhasani was seen to ascend to the stage and at 4:15 Bhasani stood to speak. He said "We want peace but they want war. India has stationed an army just because Bhasani demanded a just share of the international water." He said "This is a peaceful and non-violent march but he also warned that if India failed to heed his demands, he would form a volunteer group and lead a boycott movement of Indian goods in Bangladesh beginning August 16<sup>th</sup>." <sup>691</sup> It was a peaceful march of protest, which he concluded with a speech. During his long speech he said, among other things, India had no right to stop water that nature allowed humen beings to enjoy. The measure was to

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<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>690</sup> Enayetullah Khan, "A Tribute to the Ancestor," *Weekly Holiday*, Dhaka, November 22, 2002.



deprive human beings of their right to enjoy the benefits of the nature God had given to men. By now Farakka's effect led to the suffering of three million people. As a result, the new government declared that the effect of the dam was a national problem. Bhasani before the long march said, "Until we have a just deal to share the Ganges water, the struggle will continue."<sup>692</sup>

The news of Bhasani's march reached the international media. Bangladeshis abroad also took up the issue to protest against Indian "water aggression" all over the globe, including in the USA and the United Nations.

Years later, in 1993, an International committee was formed with the head office in New York, and branch offices in other cities of USA, Canada and Europe. Bangladeshis, working with environmental groups in India and the West, began an international campaign to pressure India to sign a deal. Seminars and conferences were held in Europe and North America and American Senator, and Congressman were lobbied and some visited Bangladesh. There was pressure from Western nations and environmental groups on India to sign a deal. After a long campaign, in December of 1996, India finally agreed to settle this problem by sharing its water with Bangladesh. It signed a long awaited deal, a success of Bhasani long after his death.<sup>693</sup>

<sup>691</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 533.

<sup>692</sup> Mawlana Bhasani Souvenir, 91, p. 26.

<sup>693</sup> I have interviewed Atiqur Rahman Salu (President of International Farakka Committee, based in New York) from time to time to obtain necessary information on developments in India Bangladesh relations). Also see for new developments reported by Mamun Quazi "Crisis looms as India plans water diversion" posted on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2003. <<http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/dams/farakka.htm>> June 6, 2003.

### The Last Few Days of Bhasani

On 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 1976 due to quick deterioration of his health, Bhasani was sent to England for medical treatment. He had an operation but his cancer treatment was kept a secret. Before the operation, the regular anesthetic did not work on him Dr. Riddle said: "Very tough body, tough guy." The doctor had to put strong anesthetic. Only with a double dose was he made senseless.<sup>694</sup>

Immediately upon his return from London on September 28<sup>th</sup> he was again admitted to the hospital and released on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and returned to Santosh. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 1976 he was admitted to the hospital for the last time.

Fazlee Khuda records the conversation of the man only an hour away from his last breath, who defiantly kept talking, despite the request from his doctor and his wife Alima Khatun. Bhasani said, "How can I stop talking? All my life I kept talking. ...After death, I will not be back to talk to you."<sup>695</sup> It was on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1976 in the evening that he died of a heart attack. The news of Bhasani's death was a deep shock for the nation.

Maksud says

To the commoners, [he was] the leader with the heart of a mother. He fought against kings and emperors, ...organized people against the British, and in 1954 led the defeat of the Muslim League government, said "*Assalamu Alikum*" to the West Pakistani rulers. He was the man behind the 1969 mass uprising, and was the man who openly declared the independence of Bangladesh. After independence he fought against imperialism, to defend the sovereignty and

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<sup>694</sup> Report by Dr. Syed Mokarram Ali quoted in Makud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 538.

<sup>695</sup> Fazlee Khuda, "Puroshutter Mawlana Bhasani" (The Great Man Bhasani) In Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op.cit. p.157.

independence of Bangladesh. Despite being a politician...he even in his final days led in selfless devotion.<sup>696</sup>

India's Congress Party President at the time, in a letter sent to *Barta Sanesta* characterized Bhasani as "the dedicated server of the people."<sup>697</sup> Bhasani was buried with state honours, his graveyard turned into a meeting ground of Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists; all praying their holy books, the Bible, the Koran, the Gita, and the Tripitok from morning through evening. It also turned into meeting ground of different religious leaders.<sup>698</sup>

It is true that unlike his contemporaries; Bhasani did not have to worry about assassins; there was no coup against him because he never came to power. His openness to other religions as a Sufi, and remaining in opposition seemed to have been an effective way of communicating with the masses. How could he do it consistently all his life? In the above we have seen it was his practice of *rubúbiyah* idea, in his belief in the lordship of God, the "Rabb" the all embracing that gave him strength.

We have covered almost 50 years of his life from 1929-1976 that Bhasani lived in Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In each of the context, we have seen his response to situations he remained implicit but the evidence so far, suggests that he did not change his religious convictions: his concern for the working class, the dispossessed, and groups struggling for their rights. He speaks of them and offering arguments in favor of their defense.

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<sup>696</sup> *Maksud.*, p. 545.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 548.

<sup>698</sup> *Maksud*, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani*, *op. cit.*, p. 548.

## PART 3:

### THE ISLAMIC BASIS OF BHASANI'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

#### CHAPTER 7: BHASANI'S VISION AND HIS VARYING STANCES

In this chapter there will be three sections: In section 1, I am going to discuss the question, did he “flip flop” in politics? In section 2, I will offer a more in depth examination of the religious basis of Bhasani's political leadership. In section 3, I will demonstrate his originality and based on the observations draw conclusions.

#### SECTION 1: VARYING STANCES: WAS BHASANI AN IDEALIST OR A PRAGMATIST?

Many scholars and serious political observers contend that Bhasani's leadership shows “incertitude” and a “lack of precise direction,” which they do not regard as constructive. He changed political allegiance many times: In Bengal in the 1920's he was a Congress Party member. In Assam in the 1930's he became a Muslim League leader. In Pakistan during the 1950's he founded the Awami Muslim League and later during the 1960's and 70's he founded and worked with the NAP.

We have seen that Rao Farman Ali in his work during the 70's wrote "...Mawlana Bhasani was a very powerful leader, but in his vocation and thinking there was no consistency.”<sup>699</sup> Manmath Nath Das, who wrote about Indian politics during the time of Partition, identified Bhasani's role in Assam by Assam government as that of a “fanatic.”<sup>700</sup> Taffazal Hossain Malik Mia, the editor of the *Ittifaq* newspaper suggested

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<sup>699</sup> Rao Farman Ali, Butto Sheikh Mujib and Bangladesh, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>700</sup> Manmath Nath Das, Partition and Independence of India, op. cit., p. 121.

during the 60's in Pakistan that Bhasani had no political philosophy.<sup>701</sup> Mohammed Toha called him an "Islamic fundamentalist."<sup>702</sup> In 1970 Toha resigned as the General Secretary of the Executive Committee of the East Pakistan NAP party, using the excuse that Bhasani was bringing communalism into a progressive party. Chandrika Gulati, an Indian writer correlates post- liberation Bangladeshi politics to "fundamentalism." Bhasani was labeled by her as a "fundamentalist" leader when he opposed the building of an Indian dam over the Ganges River.<sup>703</sup> These were typical of habitual misunderstandings of Bhasani's thought and action.

Asia Week summarizes the confusion among serious academics and political observers in the following:

Bhasani was perhaps the most discussed, talked-about, maligned, admired and misunderstood leader of his time in the sub-continent. He was known in various stages of his long political career to be an "Indian agent" and "Indian hater", "anti-Pakistan", "religious and atheist", "anti-Communist", and "pro-Peking", under-cover operator for both the Communists and America's CIA - the list is virtually endless. The *Mawlana's* unusual and somewhat unorthodox policies provided basis for much of the suspicion.<sup>704</sup>

A remarkable number of political observers have questioned his seemingly contradictory stances. They all imply that he did not have any consistent vision in politics. Bhasani's critics regarded him as politically "unpredictable" or as an "opportunist." Further, some would say he was a "nationalist" and others that he based his ideas on "socialism" and still others saw him as a "religious fanatic."

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<sup>701</sup> Mofizul Islam, Upomohadesher Rajniti O. Baikthitto (Politics and Personality of the Subcontinent), op. cit., p. 118. Saiful Islam, Shadhinata, Bhasani, Bharat (Independence, Bhasani India), op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>702</sup> Mohammed Toha, in a speech in Mohipur on April 12 mentions this, quoted in Maksud's Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p.342. Also in Chandrika J. Gulati's Bangladesh: Liberation to Fundamentalism, op. cit.

<sup>703</sup> Chandrika Gulati. Bangladesh: Liberation to Fundamentalism, op. cit.

<sup>704</sup> Asia Week, November 18, 1976.

### Bhasani's Islamic Perspectives and Activism

In Chapter 4, 5 and 6, which describe Bhasani's activities in Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh, a close observation shows that he was involved with several political parties and groups. He founded political parties; but they were not based on clearly stated *rubúbiyah* ideas. This seems to be one of the reasons for the existing confusion.

In Chapter 4, as a testimony to Bhasani's personal calling we saw that in the 1930's Bhasani shifted his allegiance from the Congress party to the Muslim League.

Bhasani says:

I began to see the Congress turn into the instrument of the India's *zamindar* and the capitalist class. The National Congress looked as if it lost its national character. The hope that led me to join the Congress Party was to bring happiness for the Bengali working class that suffered from the exploitation of the *zamindars* now themselves turned into something like an unexplained joke. Finding no other alternative I left the Congress and looked for new directions to fight for the peasant's rights. During this time as a result of the oppression of the *zamindars* I myself with few thousand destitute peasant families left for Assam. ...I have realized that I needed a platform or a political party. Without finding any alternative I have joined the Muslim League.<sup>705</sup>

He seems to change parties in order to achieve his goals. In this case, most of the *zamindars* in Bengal happened to be powerful Congress party supporters and in alliance with the British. He fought for the rights of the dispossessed peasants against the *zamindars* and the British. His decision to leave the Congress was effected by the fact that the *zamindars* expelled him from Bengal, with British help, for his support of the peasants' rights. It was impossible for him to stay in the Congress Party and still promote the peasant's rights. Clearly, he changed his stance on the grounds of a) circumstances b) personal calling to serve the peasant's rights.

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<sup>705</sup> Maksud, Bhasani, op. cit., p.255. (Emphasis added).

Manmath Nath Das, in his book Partition and Independence of India, refers to Maulavi Abdul Hamid (Bhasani), as “a fanatical immigrant.” based on the government report.<sup>706</sup> In our research in Chapter 4 we found, that being a leader of the Muslim League and his use of Islamic vocabulary and his dress like a Muslim cleric easily made him perceived as a Muslim “fanatic.” In addition, as a peasant leader he characterized the struggle by the *za’lim* (oppressor) as *zulm* (oppression). Bhasani’s use of such symbols is largely responsible for the confusion. In Assam, as a Muslim League leader fighting against the Congress Party’s stand on the “line system,” as mentioned earlier he reiterated his philosophy that God’s ordinance states that “Whatever is there in the universe (and) on the earth belongs to God” interpreting this to mean that as “a creation of God we will enjoy the wealth legally and equally.”<sup>707</sup> Inspired by *rubúbiyah* ideals, he fought against the “line system” that prevented peasants, both Hindu and Muslim, from enjoying land and wealth equally. Bhasani’s intentions as stated in his own words revealed a different inner logic which guided his actions than that of the government of Assam which did not seem to take time to study Bhasani’s type of religious outlook.

Bhasani changed political party twice during the Pakistan period. He says:

Not long after Pakistan was created I started to have dispute with the existing Najimuddin government. I have clearly realized that Muslim League ministry is nothing but has turned into an instrument of the country’s rich and the aristocratic class. Therefore, with this organization there will be no change in the lot of the workers and the peasants. Finding no other alternative I have established the Awami League.<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> Manmath Nath Das, Partition and Independence of India, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>707</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit. p. 451.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

The Awami League was the first opposition political party in Pakistan. During the early years of Pakistan, Bengalis were systematically excluded from the administration of East Pakistan. Bhasani felt compelled to form the Awami League as the opposition party and he also established an opposition newspaper, the *Ittifaq*. During the 1950's, Iskander Mirza's Muslim League government portrayed Bhasani as an "Indian agent".<sup>709</sup> Bhasani was clear that what he was doing was fighting against the new Pakistani feudal elite and demanding the Bengali people's rights be recognized as well as opposing the Muslim League's communal policies.

Later, he opposed the Pakistani military rulers who used Islam to defend their rule in the name of the Islamic state of Pakistan. The ruling elite consistently claimed that his criticisms were harmful to the state and that this meant, by implication, that he was an enemy of Islam and an "Indian agent." Bhasani's justification was that the rulers were busy calling Pakistan an "Islamic state" without changing their lifestyle into Islamic lifestyle. To him it was more important to lead an "Islamic life" than to make an "Islamic state." An Islamic life meant to be "honest, to be personally religious, to tolerate the minority rights, stop using alcohol, bribe, prostitution, and gambling." For Bhasani, Pakistan's rulers were leading an unIslamic life while they were busy saving the so-called Islamic state.<sup>710</sup>

In Chapter 5, on Pakistan we have also seen Bhasani criticized the Muslim League, the ruling party, saying there is no difference between the Muslim League, Nazami Islam and Jama'ati Islam. All three conservative Islamic parties in Pakistan

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<sup>709</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmad, Amar Dhekha Rajnir Ponchas Bochor, (Fifty years of Politics as I Observed It), *op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>710</sup> Maksud, Bhasani, *op. cit.*, p. 167.



based their ideology on normative Islam and he had serious philosophical differences with them. He asserted that the cultural rights of the Bengalis must be recognized and he demanded East Pakistan's autonomy. Bhasani says:

On the part of the central government of Pakistan giving East Pakistan its cultural rights was as if doing *huqqú al-ibád*. The Central government led by the [West Pakistanis] did not perform its expected duty. God's ordinance therefore did not tolerate this injustice for ever. Because the first condition of *rubúbiyah* is the responsibility of the government to distribute what is due to its subjects on the question of administrative, commercial, business, educational, and religious matters. In other words, it is the responsibility of the government to provide what is their *haq*. When you take the responsibility of governing never deviate even an inch from doing this.<sup>711</sup>

An understanding of the Bengali context was a central focus for him, and he based that understanding on his *rubúbiyah* philosophy. The Muslim League government's refusal to provide Bengali people's autonomy rights and later the military government of Ayub's opposition to his demands for Bengali people's rights led Bhasani to declare such regimes as "*zálím*." Bhasani says:

"*Zálím*" has no religion or race. Our religion does not say that if "*zálím*" is a Muslim it cannot be challenged. Our Prophet denounced the *zálím* emperor of Egypt and he appreciated the Persian emperor, Núshiraván. But neither of them were Muslims. The fight against the *zálím* will continue, whether a Muslim or a Hindu.<sup>712</sup>

Bhasani was aware of Abu Dharr al-Ghifári and appreciated his example of protest against the Muslim governor of Syria. Abu Dhar accused Mu'áwiyah as hoarder of wealth who deprived the poor of their wealth. In appreciation of his role in history

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<sup>711</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, *Rabubiater Bumika* (The Role of *Rububiyah*) *op. cit.* p.10. (Emphasis added)

<sup>712</sup> Mohammed Waliullah, "Bangla-Assamer Jananeta" ("The mass leader of Bengal and Assam") In Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani* (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 361.

Bhasani founded the Abu Dhar College in Dhaka.<sup>713</sup> Perhaps in the same manner as Abu Dhar, Bhasani called the Muslim League: "The party of the blood suckers! They say, 'all Muslims are brothers.' "I agree that Muslims are brothers, but if the Bengali people are Muslim brothers why can not they find jobs?" Bhasani further questioned the sincerity of the populist rulers by saying:

Why, even when we are numerically the majority, do we not get our share?  
... The party of the betrayers! Whenever you have a chance, you confuse the real issue by saying 'Islam is in danger! Islam is in danger!'<sup>714</sup>

To Bhasani a real Muslim should be honest, should not gamble, and should not drink wine, should do ritual cleansing and pray five times a day and these leaders does not do any of that. Bhasani questioned: "They say they are the real Muslims. What type of Muslims are they? If they are our Muslim brothers as they claim, then who are the abusers, the 'unfaithful' ...?"<sup>715</sup>

During Pakistan time Iskander Mirza, was removed from power by a coup and became an obscure figure in Pakistani politics. After Ayub Khan supplanted Iskander Mirza by expelling him out of the country Bhasani said Ayub do not own the country to do whatever he wished to do. He said the country should be ruled by the wishes of the dispossessed, the poor. For Ayub's dictatorial policy Bhasani characterized him a *za'lim*. Bhasani said: "there is no place for a *za'lim* in the kingdom of God."<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> Mohammed Azraf, "Bhasani ak Annanya Baiktityo" ("Bhasani a Unique Personality") in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>714</sup> Fazle Khuda, "Purushuttam Mawlana Bhasani" ("The Unique Personality Mawlana Bhasani"), in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Bhasani often referred to *rubúbiyah* to mean the kingdom of God and his belief in that the inherent rights of people, which he saw as truly Islamic. He found the rule of Pakistan's undemocratic leaders to be rule of *nafsányiat* (showing egocentricity). Bhasani continued to use religious vocabulary in his opposition to the populist Muslim leaders. He claimed what is to be a true Muslim and said, "We are true Muslims. We fear God. Those who (are responsible for) all the oppression, caring little for God and his Prophet - my *jihad* is against them."<sup>717</sup> Compared to the commonly used meaning of *jihad* as being holy war against non Muslims, here Bhasani's use of *jihad*, to mean struggle was against oppressive regimes.

The famous *Ittifaq* editor Taffazal Hossain Manik Mia wrote columns on the politics of Pakistan, in favor of the Bengalis. However in 1957, when Bhasani said, "*assalamu alikum*"(implying goodbye) to Pakistan, the editor was shocked at such anti state remark and characterized Bhasani as "a *Lungi* all *Mawlana*," implying that Bhasani was a rural *Mullah*, an ignorant rural man to make such a comment.<sup>718</sup> The term *mullah* refers to a rural priest, lacking intellectual depth. Because Bhasani wore the dress of a Bengali peasant and he truly looked like a Bengali rural priest the editor found corelationship with him as being a rural *mullah*. Manik Mia's comment is similar to the infamous statement by Churchill who, not appreciating Gandhi's religious spirituality and struggle, called him a "Naked Fakir." In fact, although Bhasani wore Bengali peasant dress, he was a literate person. He dressed like the people he represented. We have seen

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<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150.

\* *Lungi*, a long cloth used as Loin cloth mostly by the rural Muslims of Bengal.

<sup>718</sup> Saiful Islam, *Shadhinata, Bhasani, Bharat (Independence, Bhasani, India)* (Bengali), *op. cit.*, p.113.

in the previous chapters that he was a well-informed intellectual, who knew what he was doing.

In 1957 Bhasani established the NAP party. The NAP was formed with left leaning parties from all Pakistan and Bhasani was the President. We have seen in chapter 5 that, while Bhasani appreciated the Chinese type of socialism, after visiting China he criticized that country for its atheist policy. Because Bhasani identified himself as a Muslim and indeed, he was always a practicing Muslim. He repeatedly claimed that his ideas were derived from Islam. Contrary to the claims of his critics, he never said that he was a Maoist or a Communist. In chapter 5 and 6 we have seen, the Communists came to take shelter in his shadow. It seems that Bhasani fought for the rights of the peasants and laborers based on his *rubūbiyah* vision, as part of his fight for the "have-nots" - and so did the Communists. They were drawn together by their common goals.

Abdul Matin wrote:

What (did he think) about the Communists? The answer is the Communists relied on Bhasani for their strategic purpose. They decided to proceed under Bhasani's shelter. Bhasani said: "Many people call me a Communist. But I am not a Communist. In Islam, people's duty is divided into two types; duty to God and duty to men. The poor people of Pakistan, especially of East Pakistan were neglected. I fight for them. That is what I say to people. That is why some people call me a Communist. Some others call me a "fanatic *Mawlānā*." I don't care what they say. Whatever they want to call me, whether a "Communist" or "a fanatic *Mawlana*," I don't spare any government (to fight) against exploitation, and oppression."<sup>719</sup>

Haji Danesh wrote his intimate movements in jail with Bhasani during the 60's:

When we were in jail together I realized that Bhasani had a curiosity about the Communists. He said, "Communism is doing well in China." I said "if it

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<sup>719</sup> Haji Mohammed Danesh, "Mawlana Bhasanir Rajnaitik Jibon" (Mawlana Bhasani's Political Life) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p.12.

comes here you will have to shave your beard.” He replied: “if I have to shave, so what? People at least will be able to have food to survive and if my Islam is really true, then a thousand forces of Communism will not be able to stop it.”<sup>720</sup>

Bhasani’s intentions as recorded by his associates and Sufi followers show his vision and the consistency of his actions. Thus, the fact that Bhasani worked with Communists did not seem to effect his commitment to his faith because he remained intensely religious. Abdul Matin says, “Bhasani from first to last did not lose his trust in Allah, and his creature man *ashrafatul Maklukhat*” (the best creature).<sup>721</sup>

Bhasani said in 1974 that his ideas were founded in Islam. As a reaction to this Rashed Khan Menon resigned, saying Bhasani had “no direction in politics.” In a statement titled “Bhasani to the so-called Communists,” Bhasani said:

To clarify my side of the story about Rashed Khan Menon, I want to say that, for last 30 years, the Communists have been trying to do politics under my umbrella. But they could not be successful. Because I have never been a Communist, and I am not even now – *In shá Alláh* I will never be ... I fought all my life against exploitation and oppression. I will continue to do it up to the last day of my life. He (Menon) says “the socialists say they will establish *Lá iláha* (there is no god) but this godly society (*hukúmat-i rabbáni*) of *rubúbiyah* will establish *illá Alláh* (but there is God).<sup>722</sup>

Bhasani worked closely with the Communists and often was under pressure to become a Communist; however, his statements show he never felt there was a void in his religion. He never lost faith in his religion, or in God. Thus he never became a Communist. We have seen that during his time with the NAP party, while it sometimes may have been necessary to make a collective decision which might affect his commitment to his religion, Bhasani as the President of the NAP, took certain decisions

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<sup>720</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>721</sup> Abdul Matin, Amar Dristitae Mawlana Bhasani (My Observation of Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 32

alone, to the displeasure of the Communists in the party. As a consequence many of them left. He always seemed to remain firm in his decision. When he was charged as a Communist once, he said angrily, "You see through one eye only. ... I am not a Communist. I use them for my political purposes. You do not see that."<sup>723</sup>

Bhasani said of the Communist members of the party, "They come and go. When they are young they stay with me. As they start to feel like they are matured they leave me."<sup>724</sup> Beduin Samad a retired high ranking police officer in the Pakistan period in his article, "Bhasani in my Recollections" says,

Like others I also had the impression that he was a pro-China Communist. But I saw him using Islamic language in his speech, and instances from Muslim history (and this) made me get rid of that misunderstanding.<sup>725</sup>

As a matter of strategy, Communists worked with him and he worked with them. But Bhasani was always a believer of his *rububiyah* ideas. Bhasani himself said,

I am an agent only of the oppressed people, nobody else. I work for them as an agent and I will continue to do so. I have never been the agent of anybody and I will never become an agent of anybody.<sup>726</sup>

Generally, Bhasani showed to be not accountable to his party or to anybody but to his principles. In Bangladesh, Bhasani was repeatedly branded as a "fundamentalist." Mohammed Toha a leader of the NAP, said: "The main principle of NAP is non-

<sup>722</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Rabubiater Bumika (The Role of Rububiyat), op.cit., p. 4., Also in Abdul Matin, Amar Dristita Mawlana Bhasani (My Observation of Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit. p. 32.

<sup>723</sup> A. Z. M Shamsul Alam, "Mazlu'm Janoneta Mawlana Bhasani", ("The Destitute Mass Leader Mawlana Bhasani") in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 404.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid., p. 406.

<sup>725</sup> Beduin Samad, "Sritir Alendee Mawlana Bhasani", (Mawlana Bhasani in my Memory) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 117.

communal. But *Mawlana's* statements and speeches show communalism. For this, the prestige of NAP is at stake."<sup>727</sup> For Toha, Bhasani's use of Islamic terminology implied communalism. However, research shows that Bhasani functioned on a deeper level, and that his only goal was to establish justice in society. The universal, open approach of Bhasani's *rubūbiyah* ideas attracted all kinds of elements to his party, from the right and from the left, including Communist supporters such as Toha. However, it seems that at some point, when Bhasani reiterated his commitment to Islam as the basis of his vision, serious Communists such as Toha became angry and even resigned from the party. To Toha Islam and Communism were at logger-heads. But to Bhasani both fight for justice so he preferred to work with them while keeping his own identity.

Maksud says Bhasani was aware of the criticisms by his opponents about his varying stances. He said:

Some of my opponents who do not think deeply about politics used to say "Bhasani often changes political party." But my critics did not for a moment think what my principles are. If they think a little deeply it will not be hard for them to understand that Bhasani changed political party on the question of principles. Bhasani did not change it on matters of narrow minded party interest.<sup>728</sup>

In this context we will now devote some time to exploring the reasons that his critics failed to understand him and will examine some important questions and arguments more closely.

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<sup>726</sup> Akther-ul-Alam, "Mawlana Bhasanir Nam Sangram" (Mawlana Bhasani's Name is Revolution), in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 420.

<sup>727</sup> Toha quoted in Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hanid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>728</sup> Maksud, Bhasani, op. cit., p. 259.

### Was Bhasani Communal minded?

Following the independence of Bangladesh, Bhasani protested Indian domination over the country and was branded in India and in Bangladesh as "communal minded" and a "fundamentalist." The pro-Moscow Communist Party leader, Sri Moni Singh, on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1973 on this issue said he will destroy Bhasani into pieces and remove him from the soil of Bengal.<sup>729</sup> Bhasani's powerful stands in favor of his ideas often deeply annoyed some leaders some of whom went so far as to even to threaten his life. Abdul Matin a spiritual follower of Bhasani says:

Bhasani has a title before his name- *Mawlana*. He has a beard and wears a cap, and (on) every occasion talks about *Allah* and his Prophet. Because of these things he was called communal-minded by many.<sup>730</sup>

It seems that his appearance was deceptive. Bhasani's non-communal approach is evident in his advice to his followers. He quoted from the *Quran*:

Allah said: "Take My color and make yourself like Me".

Bhasani said: "In the care of His creations does He discriminate? When the Lord does not discriminate, the followers of the *rubûbiyah* philosophy should not discriminate against the people of other faiths."<sup>731</sup>

The Naksalite Communist of Pabna, popularly known as Comrad Alauddin said:

*Mawlana* Bhasani tries to bring religion into politics. Even when he was a religious leader, he worked with the Communists for a long period of his life. Even when he was a *pir*, he was not communal minded. From the time of the British period he took the initiative to stop communal disturbance and bring

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<sup>729</sup> Khoka Roy quoted in Maksud's Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit. p. 461. Sri Moni Singh's comment was made on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1973.

<sup>730</sup> Abdul Matin, Amar Dristitae Mawlana Bhasani (My Observation of Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 29 (Emphasis added).

<sup>731</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari, "Bhasani Rajnitir Potobhumi" (The Political Background of Bhasani Politics) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 697.



peace. Not only has he fought against communalism but also against religious fanaticism. Throughout his political career, reactionary circles often blame him, and in some stages of his struggle he became isolated, but he did not give up. This hard working but controversial leader with patience and devotion and intelligence gathered new friends and in the face of crisis he came to lead people.<sup>732</sup>

Indeed, Bhasani denounced communal policies in no uncertain terms by the most indelible means at his disposal. This is especially true about his confrontation with Ayub on the question of censoring of Rabindranath Tagore's works on the later being a Hindu. Bhasani believed in universal brotherhood.

Abdul Goffur a Journalist and political observer says:

He often aligned with pro-Indian policies to fight against imperialism. But after the independence of Bangladesh, when India stopped the flow of the water, and adopted the attitude of the "big brother" with Bangladesh, influencing its policies, he could not tolerate it. Just as he was not a "communal-minded" leader, Bhasani also was not an anti-Indian political leader. However, he was uncompromising on the question of the independent policy of Bangladesh. This attitude certainly reflected the wishes of the Bangladeshis.<sup>733</sup>

Foyez Ahmad a reporter for the daily newspaper *Purbokon* says:

In the changing world of progressive politics the main pillar of his politics was non-communalism. In fact, among his other characteristics, his non-communal stance made him one of the most modern politicians of our time.<sup>734</sup>

Bhasani's non-communalism is a hallmark of his Sufi based *rubûbiyah* philosophy. The peasant leader Haji Mohammed Danesh wrote: "Many people allege that

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<sup>732</sup> Quoted in Matin, Amar Dristita Mawlana Bhasani (My Observation of Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 29.(Emphasis added)

<sup>733</sup> Abdul Goffur, "Mawlana Bhasani Ak Mohan Biplobi Neta" (Mawlana Bhasani, a great Revolutionary leader), in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 448.

<sup>734</sup> Foyez Ahmad, "Sangrami Oitajjer Jagroto Chatona Mawlana Bhasani" (The Legend of Revolutionary Tradition Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 68.

Bhasani was communal minded. ... In 1950 when I was in jail I came to know him personally. From there I realized that he was non communal-minded.”<sup>735</sup>

It seems that the *rubúbiyah* philosophy’s universalistic perspective dictated his humanism. Also as a religious leader, he was against conversion in general. Sometimes that alone made people wonder what type of Muslim leader he was. On one occasion, he even suggested to a Hindu who came to him to be converted to Islam that “conversion would bring no good” to him and asked the person to go home and read the *Gita*.<sup>736</sup>

Arun Bhattacharjee, an Indian writer wrote in 1972 in his article “*Encounter with the Mawlana at Santosh*” in 1972: “On a purely secular plane, he can be compared to Ram Monohar Lohia and Kamraj Nadar of India,”<sup>737</sup> two secular, humanist Indian political activists.

Bhasani’s political leadership showed, not support for Islamic normativism or so-called fundamentalist leadership, but rather that he was against the status quo. He believed in a universal model and was dedicated to serving his people.

In Chapter 6 on Bangladesh, we have seen his anti-communalism reflected in how he took food first from a Hindu on breaking his fast, and in his wish that all sects will have peace; members of all sects visit his grave and this is another indication of his secular stance. This openness to other religions is a characteristic of some Sufis. In many cases, particularly in Bengal, Hindus and Muslims both resort to respected *pírs*, and the *pír* and his foundation will feed persons of both religions. Further, Bhasani not only

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<sup>735</sup> Haji Danesh, “Mawlana Bhasanir Rajnitik Jibon” (Mawlana Bhasani’s Political Life) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu’im Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op.cit., p. 5.

<sup>736</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid., p. 483.

declares his friendship with Hindus, but takes political action (naming Hindus as ministers in Suhrawady cabinet in Pakistan) and undertakes symbolic actions- as an effective way of communicating with the masses.

#### Nationalism and Ultra nationalism

The research revealed instances of Bhasani's universalistic approach. However, his politics was primarily Bengal based. After the disappointment with the *Khilafat* movement (discussed in chapter 3) he gradually became more pragmatic and started to believe in a nation state, instead of the medieval kingship (*Khilafat*). As part of his understanding of the universal *rubúbiyah* philosophy and a modernist in outlook he wanted Bengal to be a nation. He was frustrated and resented to Jinnah's change of Lahore resolution into Pakistan resolution. This evidence along with his fight for the independence of Bangladesh makes Bhasani a Bengali nationalist.

However, Bhasani's belief in the *rubúbiyah* philosophy led him to be not an ultra nationalist but to have a universalistic approach. The evidence of Bhasani's universalism is manifest in his various actions. In 1975 when the first Bangladesh government made Bengali nationalism one of its objectives, an official from Sheikh Mujib's government attempted to persuade Bhasani to change the name of Mohammed Ali College, which he established in memory of the leader of the *Khilafat* movement. The government complaint was that he had named the college after a non-Bengali, from the west of Bangladesh. He was advised to re-name it "Bhasani College" to be eligible for government funding. Bhasani reacted with anger: "If you hate the West and Pakistanis,

why don't change your Prophet who is from the west of Bangladesh, not a Bengali. Why not make a Bengali prophet for yourself?"<sup>738</sup>

In order to satisfy the stubborn Bhasani, government had to change its decision. Mujib, the Bengali nationalist leader had to come to inaugurate the Mohammed Ali College as a government College retaining its Bhasani-given name. This illustrates again that Bhasani fought for rights of the Bengali people, but he was not an extreme nationalist who condoned hatred of non-Bengalis. There is other evidence of this kind as well. Bhasani fought for the rights of the Bengalis in Pakistan. During the Bangladesh period he was against Bengalis committing massacres of Beharis. He strongly defended the rights of the Beharis.

About Bhasani's use of techniques such as *gherao*, or at least popular agitation against Ayub, and the language of force (his declaration of *jihad* against India over the water controversy) are not necessarily pacifist techniques. Bhasani is not exactly a pacifist like Gandhi. Pacifism has not been important in Islam in any case, Bhasani is rather peace-loving. He did however, deplore violence, as witness to his sadness at the fate of Mujibur Rahman.

As Mohammed Azraf a spiritual follower and educationist says:

He was a political teacher as well as a religious preacher. He did not do his duty by giving instructions from high places. He did his duty sitting with the people on their same level, dining with them eating the same food, by becoming involved in their sorrows and joys and raised their demands."<sup>739</sup>

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<sup>738</sup> A. Z. M. Shamsul Alam, "Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani" (Mawlana Bhasani, the Destitute Leader) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 421.

<sup>739</sup> Mohammed Azraf, "Bhasani Ak Ononya Baikito" (Bhasani a Unique Personality) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 29.

Although Bhasani worked with the Communists towards the goal of establishing justice, from the beginning he also fought for the democratic rights of people. Bhasani's commitment to the welfare of people and to democracy became clear especially during the Bangladesh period. In Chapter 6 we saw how he fought against Sheikh Mujib's one party rule. He said:

... without democracy independence is useless. Democracy is the heart that circulates blood in the body. Without the existence of heart, the body can't survive, like a fish cannot live outside water. Governments are for people. People are not for the government. In a country the government is temporary but people are not.<sup>740</sup>

During his Bangladesh period he dreamed of seeing democracy established in his country. He said, "My life's dream was to see democracy established. I think that dream will not be fulfilled."<sup>741</sup> He was frustrated with Mujib and his actions.

Bhasani was a religious person but he brought religion into politics in a different way that allowed him to work with nationalists, Communists, and Islamic-minded people, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists.

In his public meetings there were gatherings of all kinds of people. During the meeting in the Palton Grounds, as the time for *salat* arrived, he would say the *adhán* (call for prayer) and pray. Shahed Ali a writer and a political observer says: "I saw him ... perform the call for prayer and no follower would join him. He would do the prayer alone (and) I felt bad. I felt like, within this big political noise, Bhasani was a lonely person; a

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<sup>740</sup> Mahfuzullah, "Mawlana Bhasani Raschna Prosanghe" (Regarding Mawlana Bhasani Written Essays) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 597.

<sup>741</sup> Azad Sultan, "Shoshan Julum o Adpoithya Birudha Sangrame Chelo Bhasanir Rajniti" (Bhasani's Struggle was against exploitation, Oppression and Fight against Domination) Mawlana Bhasani Saranika 91, op. cit., p. 25-26.

solitary man." <sup>742</sup>Bhasani took prayer as a personal responsibility but did not force others to join him.

Indeed, Bhasani did not employ normative Islam and did not use *Sharia* rule to force people to be religious. Rather, he used a religious spirit in politics to establish fairness in society. In this struggle he excluded religious dogmatism. He personally practiced what he preached. This sincerity illustrates that he was not a popular demagogue.

Bhasani's fairly frequent change of political party made him appear to be an opportunist. But the data shows that he was not. Indeed, talking about the apparent contradictions in his changing parties, Faiz Ahmed says:

He changed political parties for strategic ideological reasons. For that reason he was misunderstood by others. ...One thing it showed was that he was non-communal. This type of thinking made him to be a modern leader promoting democratic and human rights issues. <sup>743</sup>

Perhaps Bhasani might be seen as essentially a secular reformer who realised that as a reformer, that working within an Islamic party would not appeal to the Bengali people who are proud of their culture. Therefore, he chose to work with socialists and Communists or to form alliances with progressive parties, as his broad based *rubúbiyah* principles allowed him to do.

Bhasani was a determined man. When he decided to do something, he did it. Mohamed Hossain a spiritual follower of Bhasani records Bhasani's conversation with a political leader in the Pakistan period. The leader suggested:

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<sup>742</sup> Shahed Ali, "Mawlana Bhasanir Shanniddhee" (In the Presence of Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 214.

Hujur, by going to China with the government party you made us the government's agents." *Hujur* said, "You understand nothing of politics...When was the last time you went outside your house? ...at home in the *thatched* quarter you whisper about the commas and periods of [Marxist] ideology. It is not practical in politics. You have to go to people with an open heart; I only made the road open for you to get out of your narrow mindedness."<sup>744</sup>

Examples like the above shows Bashani's "ideas in action." The data shows Bashani's varying stances were not accidental, nor the result of a "flip flop" mentality. It was not a result of misguided politics but of a consistent, underlying vision. It appears that part of Bashani's Islamic philosophy of *rubúbiyah* was in a way for him a class struggle, for it seems he felt that he was called to defend the rights of the *mazlúm*, the "oppressed," against the *zálims*, "oppressors."

Although he never founded a political party with his stated *rubúbiyah* philosophy, he was conscious about his principles. He himself used the word ideology to emphasize its importance, explaining that he said:

.. politics based on only slogans [or] power-centred political movements and organizations cannot bring [about the] all- round welfare and freedom of a people. Deep political commitment and strong character, uncompromising revolutionary leaders and workers can bring [about the] all round welfare of people. Character develops from a consciousness of ideology and its practices. Organization should be based on ... program leadership and worker. In the heat of the movement men can show a great mentality of sacrifice, but those who can remain unchanged when they come to power are only those who have a long cultivation of the right ideology and who have developed great character.<sup>745</sup>

Following his vision Bhasani seemed to contend the *Hukúmat-i Rabbáni* ("government by the Lord") as gradualist politics; that political change comes about

<sup>743</sup> Foyez Ahmad, "Sangrami Oitejjir Jagrotochatona" (The Revolutionary Expression of Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani)*, op cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>744</sup> Mohammed Hossain, "Mawlana Bhasanike Jamon Dakechi" (The Way I saw Mawlana Bhasani) Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani)*, op. cit., p. 244.

through change in character. "*Rabbáni*" here appears to mean a moral, Godly government that ministers equally to rich and poor. Sufi *pirs* often tried to inform rulers by citing to them religious precepts, trying to change their character.

Historically speaking, Bhasani's Sufi criticism of government was traditional among Sufis of South Asia, and it was depicted in literary works. Bhasani as a Sufi continued this tradition. He said that, "character develops from the consciousness of principles and its practices." Bhasani believed that political vision and strong character were necessary if a leader was to remain uncorrupted by power.<sup>746</sup>

After examining his leadership in different contexts we came to the conclusion that Bhasani was a complex figure in politics. Some of the claims regarding him for changing political parties seem were based on prejudice, propaganda and unexplained assumptions.

## SECTION 2: RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF BHASANI'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Bhasani's position as opposition leader working with the peasants was not a paid job. He lived among peasants in an underprivileged condition, sacrificing comfort. Tsuangirai, the opposition leader of Zimbabwe recently said, "Opposition is a hazardous job."<sup>747</sup> Bhasani was in opposition all his life. He faced threats, humiliation and poverty, so why did he not come to power when he had the opportunity? What compelled him to lead in opposition, in such long and difficult circumstances, from 1929-76. The discussions in the previous section led us to believe more and more that his leadership

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<sup>745</sup> Quayyum, Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. xxvi

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

<sup>747</sup> The Montreal Gazette, March 14, 2002.



had a religious character. His determination was shaped by his beliefs. This political commitment and leadership is a reflection of his obligation to a particular type of religious belief. We have seen in his ideas and its ramifications how Bhasani's loyalty arose from his belief in God and the obligation of service to His creations. Its origin is mainly Sufism. Quayyum says, "He was a mystic. He worked in the service of God."<sup>748</sup>

Personally, Bashani called himself a *savok* (a Bengali term meaning a server), or a "*rabbáni*" He said, "A *Rabbáni* will not have any pocket in which he will save for himself."<sup>749</sup> Bashani's belief in his religion gave him *imán* (commitment). He said, "In this earthly life even after our material demands are fulfilled, one more demand still remains – and that is spiritual realization."<sup>750</sup> His spiritual realization demanded that he only serve; thus by not assuming power he was doing his duty in compliance with his religious tradition. This allowed him to remain "pure and honest" by simply doing social work.

#### A Sufi Mystic in Politics

Sheila McDonough says about the Sufi perspective that:

..the well being of others takes priority over the needs of the individual. The reason is that the individual is to trust in God and not to be overly preoccupied with his or her own condition. The virtues are thus seen to flourish as part of an on-going process whereby the intentions of the individual are increasingly directed away from preoccupation with self.<sup>751</sup>

As a Sufi *pir* Bhasani lived on contributions from his disciples and his private life demonstrated his simple living and selflessness. Enayet Ullah Khan wrote:

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<sup>748</sup> Bhasani, *Rabubiater Bumika (The Role of Rububiyah)*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>750</sup> Bhasani, *Rabubiater Bumika, (The Role of Rububiyah)*, op cit., p. 6.

<sup>751</sup> McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity, A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought Of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdudi*, op. cit. p. 21.

I spent some hours with the Mawlana at his Santosh home, we asked in impish curiosity as to how he managed his livelihood. The doyen of mass politics, who was also a peer (close to a saint according to the English language) to thousands of devotees, smiled though the corner of his lips and drew our attention to the regular stream of 'murids' (devotees) coming to him for blessings and healing prayers with simple offerings of vegetables, goats or calves, rice-bags, home-made edibles, cans of milk or placing a few coins and notes that grew into piles in his courtyard. The Mawlana would accept them, and feed the poor, the visitors, including us, with an average meal. Like those rites, simple and folksy, politics was also a way of life with him and the Mawlana would, as if, romance with it at times, but fight like a lion at other times and sometimes go incommunicado on the river Jamuna on a boat for days for meditation of sorts. Politics for him was secular, and religion personal. But the Mawlana's chequered life was like a festival that few can live and enjoy.<sup>752</sup>

Mohammed Ayesh Yosuf a political activist for the NAP says:

I remember a story. It was between 1965-66. The *Mawlana* was gravely sick and was admitted at the Dhaka Medical Hospital ... Hearing of his sickness some of my relatives went to visit him. I also accompanied him. At that time many other people also went to see him. Among them a person addressing the *Mawlana* said, "*Hujur*, you have difficulty to live in Dhaka, because you don't have a house in Dhaka. I said to you several times that I can make a house for you anywhere in Dhaka. You don't accept. I have this sad feeling for not being able to help you." The *Mawlana* replied like he does normally, with a smile, "Mr. Ispahani, I don't need any specific house. The whole country is my house. The money you want to spend, spend it to increase some money for your workers....That will make me very happy." To the Mawlana personal comfort and self interest was negligent. ...Later on I heard that that gentleman was the famous industrialist Ispahani junior.<sup>753</sup>

Mohammed Mosleuddin Joardar a spiritual follower and an academician says:

The source of his income was his *Sufi* followers who mostly sent money to him. He would spend most of this money to establish schools, colleges, Madrasas, and for their expenses. The exceptional thing about it is that he did not leave anything in his name. By emptying everything into those sources and naming those in others' memories, he tried to do welfare to others.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>752</sup> Enayetullah Khan, "A tribute to the ancestor," *Weekly Holiday*, November 22, 2002.

<sup>753</sup> Mohammed Ayesh Yosuf, "Manobotabadi Mawlana Bhasani" (The Human Rights Activist Mawlana Bhasani). In Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani)*, op. cit., p. 712.

<sup>754</sup> Mohammed Mosleuddin Joardar, "Nepeteta Janotar Muktee Sangramae Mawlana Bhasani", (Mawlana Bhasani in the Struggle for the Rights of the Destitutes) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm*

Political figures in Pakistan and Bangladesh had to reckon with him, because of the nature of his following. His followers were attached to him by a traditionally strong spiritual bond—and thus he was a power to be reckoned with, and was not obliged to stay with any political party.

Annemarie Schimmel in her book Mystical Dimensions of Islam says that the central attitude in Sufi life is that of *faqr*, “poverty.” It is true the Koran Sura 35:16) has contrasted man in need of God with God, the ever Rich, the Self-sufficient.” Relating to the Quranic statement Schimmel says “...here lies one of the roots of the Sufi concept of poverty.” Poverty interpreted in a spiritual sense means the absence of desire for wealth.”<sup>755</sup> He was not overly preoccupied with his self promotion. He did not leave anything in his name.<sup>756</sup>

Irfanul Bari says about Bhasani:

Sometimes he had no food to eat. I remember one day no food arrived and we waited for someone of his followers but nothing arrived. Then I had little money which I had used to buy groceries for the family.<sup>757</sup>

While explaining the situation, Bari expressed his awe of the helplessness of this famous politician to sometimes manage his daily expenses. This is unlike the other

Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op.cit., p. 707.

<sup>755</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp.120-121.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid., p.707.

<sup>757</sup> In an interview with Irfanul Bari in June, 1995 during my fieldwork he said: "During his lifetime he ate coarse rice, put on inexpensive dress, after his death sought a three and a half yard of space for his grave. His demand to God was very high, to see an end to suffering." But when I interviewed his wife Alima Khatun, she complained about Bhasani. She said, "Bhasani all his life, kept himself busy in politics and did nothing substantial to have good education or job for children. He was busy in the welfare of others." His wife covered her face completely during the interview and did not allow me to take a picture of her. She was however, more open and friendly with the interpreter who was a young Hindu man, from the locality.

politicians of his time who made their fortunes at the expense of the poor and lived in comfort.

It seems that Bhasani's leadership was an outcome of extreme agony of mind. Alhaj Bazls Satter, a long time associate of Bhasani says, "His commitment was a result of the seriousness to *Iman*" (commitment to his faith).<sup>758</sup> Bhasani remained steadfast to his own fundamental principles to serve his people. This is Bhasani's religious character in politics and is his originality.

#### Bhasani's Weaknesses

As mentioned earlier, Bhasani's *jihad* in favor of the poor is not exactly a pacifist ideology but rather is peace-loving. We have also seen Bhasani's experience at Gandhi's ashram, he showed his general appreciation of Gandhi's technique of nonviolence, but he did not agree that Gandhi's nonviolence movement was practicable. Gandhi's was a pacifist idea based on Hindu-Jain precepts. Bhasani derived his ideas from the Islamic tradition, and in this interpretation, the world was viewed in terms of "Government by the Lord or Divine ethical order" vs. "order of the tyrants." This seems to be a simple analysis of the traditional monotheist belief in the fight between good and evil. In addition his reluctance to come to power in order to effect change and instead to fight against rulers was simplistic indeed. Lyman Tower Sargent wrote:

As society grows more and more complex, it becomes harder and harder to present a simple division between good and bad, between the white and black hats. The black and the white are mixed and become grey. We have discovered that the world is not as simple as the older movies would have us believe.....ideologies attempt to change our complex world into a pattern that will give us some signposts to help the believer distinguish good from bad. And finally, in all of them we shall see that the ideal and the reality do not quite meet,

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<sup>758</sup> Irfanul Bari revealed it to me during my conversation with him about Bhasani in July 1995 at Santosh.

[there is] a struggle to get them to meet through changes either in the ideal or in the reality.<sup>759</sup>

Bhasani's determination not to come to power and to serve people as opposition party leader led many people to think that his approach to politics was destructive and that he was simply an "agitator." Bhasani was aware of the criticisms made of his type of politics.<sup>760</sup>

Bhasani said:

Do not suffer from indecision. Be uncompromising. Those who are attacking us, disobeying our party policies, spreading rumors and condemning persons unjustly - why compromise with them? Why have understanding with them? Give up this type of indecision. Take decisions and when you take decisions, go forward to materialize them. Do not be distracted by anything.<sup>761</sup>

Indeed, he never felt any indecision. Bhasani had learned some of his agitation techniques from Congress party members, especially C. R. Das, which he used later in his career. To Bhasani, change could only be brought through protest in the form of demonstrations, *gherao*, calling strikes, and hunger strikes. These tactics despite his genuine feelings for the downtrodden made him appear to be simply a "political dissenter." Indeed, Bhasani's view of the fight between the *za'lim* and the *mazlum*, in the *rububiyah* of God, is a simple response to the many-fold problems that Bengali society needed to address. Bhasani was not seen to be concerned about Bangladesh's population problem, women's rights or child-labor in clear terms as his fight for justice. For this reason, while to a large extent his policies worked to bring about changes of regimes,

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<sup>759</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Comparative Analysis. (Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1975), p. 7.

<sup>760</sup> Mawlana Bhasanike Jototuku Monepore (As much as I could Remember Bhasani), in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 194.

another regime would come to power with similar rule, against which Bhasani continued his fight. However, despite some of the valid criticism he focused exclusively on poverty, peasants, democracy, and integrity in the government because those were issues of the first order, more than enough to focus on the others would come later.

#### Islam as a Means of Mobilization

In Bhasani's struggle for justice as his Islamic ideal served as a means of mobilizing the Sufi order, supporting and spreading political activity. As a revered person of Sufi style in general having characteristics of *tariqahs* but was mainly influenced by Qádiriya order believing in the unity of being his was more tuned into a wider appeal. In other words, Bhasani's Sufi base, his traditional relation with his followers, made him remain popular and effective in mobilizing public opinion. He relied largely on his great number of dedicated Sufi followers, most of whom were poor peasants. In November of 1976, a few months before his death, he led the famous Farakka March. While in Rajshahi, he pointed out: "If I fail to visit every village in Bangladesh to propagate this idea, I will at least remind my 1,200,000 *murids* to continue my struggle."<sup>762</sup> Indeed, some of his followers after his death further popularized the Farakka movement.

Bhasani instructed his followers to be committed to the fight against feudalism, imperialism and the *zamindari* system. A form signed by his followers also mentioned the individual member's commitment to fast during *Ramadan*, to do prayers, and to do

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<sup>761</sup> Moshir Rahman, "Mawlana Amader Oitejjo" (Mawlana is our Tradition), in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>762</sup> Jahirul Haq, "Mohamichiler Mohanaik" (The Great Mass Leader), in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), p97.

\*I met some of Bhasani's spiritual followers such as Malik Fakir and Moslemuddin Sarker at Santosh.

*haj*. One copy of the form stayed with Bhasani and another one was with the *murid*. In this way his Sufi followers were his spiritual disciples as well as his party workers.

Sufis are sometimes accused (usually falsely) of non-orthodoxy. The sure sign of that being failure to perform the rituals. Perhaps more to the point, these rituals sometimes drop out in populations with few educated members who have little contact with representatives of the orthodox tradition (such as jurists). This is the case with the Bengali peasantry living in this delta country. However, the necessity of this could be seen from the perspective that Bhasani personally followed *Sharia* rules but did not compel his followers to perform it. He often recommended them as many Sufis do that they are important religious duty. By requiring signature of the form seem more like a modern practice of making his spiritual followers also formal political party members that demanded additional responsibilities. Zahirul Haq says "to develop strong political consciousness in the mind of the peasant, this unique technique is Bhasani's own."<sup>763</sup> Max Weber says a leader is only successful when his message is appreciated by powerful social groups who serve his group or class interest.<sup>764</sup> Like other Indian Sufis and Gurus Bhasani attracted followers of all classes and positions. However, Bhasani was mainly supported by the peasantry from the delta country, with his followers directly helping in his political activities.

Bhasani's gathering for political conferences were like *Oras* (the death anniversary celebration of a saintly person where food is also served) style and his speeches were like Bengali style religious sermons. The food was *kichuri* (a type of

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<sup>763</sup> Ibid.

<sup>764</sup> H. Girth and Wright Mills, Max Weber's Essays in Sociology, op. cit., p. 34, 128.

Bengali fast food cooked with lentil and rice).<sup>765</sup> The political gatherings were organized by his Sufi followers. He even offered them spiritual blessings during such gatherings. This was an important source of Bhasani's success. This is a very unusual but original type of technique which Bhasani brought into politics.

#### Religious Spiritualism and Nation-building in South Asia

In describing the phenomenon of Bhasani, one might say that he was not as simple as his critics portrayed him. Like Gandhi's use of Hindu religious spiritualism in politics, Iqbal's dream of a Pakistani state, Bhasani also combined religious spiritualism in political actions in the nation-building works in South Asia. While they all shared goals of establishing justice in society, the means they found through their own religious and cultural traditions were different. Unlike the other leaders Bhasani, the Bengali *pir* politician used his Islamic *pir* practices to serve people.

Shahed Ali, in his article "In the Presence of Bhasani" says:

After his speech I met him. I saw some people give him an earthen jar full of water, some people a bottle, some the root of a tree, and *Mawlana* saying something, with his lips moving, and breathing on them. When *Mawlana* saw me smiling he said, "See, let people stay with their type of beliefs. Do not hurt anybody's personal beliefs. They have faith in this *zar-fookh* (black magic) and that is why they benefit. Your doctor's medicine sometimes may not help. Moreover, how many of them can afford to see a doctor?"<sup>766</sup>

As a spiritual leader he tried to help them psychologically feel better about themselves in their beliefs.

Personally, Bhasani was an excellent communicator and a skilled orator. From the many pictures taken of him giving speech it shows, he employed arm and hand gestures

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<sup>765</sup> The ingredients of the *kichuri* food were lentil, rice and vegetable or meat or both.

<sup>766</sup> Shahed Ali, "Mawlana Bhasanir Sanniddhe" (In the Presence of Bhasani), in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op cit., p. 211.



and different facial expressions to emphasize his ideas and reinforce meanings. When he spoke, he appeared to maintain eye contact with people in the audience. His body language, facial and vocal expression could express anger, happiness, relief or disappointment in order to reinforce his verbal message quite skillfully. Unlike Bhasani's other contemporaries his speech was like the sermon of a Bengali rural Muslim *alim* he would moderate the pitch, tone, rate and volume of his voice. He also used the emblem "*Hamosh*," which means "Stop!" during lectures to control a noisy crowd. "It would sound like a thunder."<sup>767</sup> He must have developed them from his years of personal experience as a *pir* and practices as a political leader in rural Bengal.

Enayet Ullah Khan says: Bhasani kept "with his flowing beard, ample kurta, lungi and a headgear made from the strands of cane, looked the same veteran in age and carriage since we had known him closely in the late fifties and the sixties."<sup>768</sup> Bhasani's originality could be seen in his use of Bengali Muslim peasant's lifestyle. Bhasani kept his principles and his dress the same way all along. Baduin Samad also wrote: "I saw him in 1954 and again in 1972. He had the same dress, same style of deliberation."<sup>769</sup> Bhasani's verbal and non-verbal strategies of communication were an example of a "sincere person, kind to his followers, and willing to serve them without anything in

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<sup>767</sup> Fazlee -e Khuda, "Puroshuttam Mawlana Bhasani" (The Great man Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>768</sup> Enayetullah Khan, "A Tribute to the Ancestor", Weekly Holiday, November 22, 2002.

<sup>769</sup> Beduin Samad, "Smrititea Aliendee Mawlana Bhasani" (Mawlana Bhasani in Our Dreams) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 115.

return.”<sup>770</sup> Most of all he spoke to people to communicate what he believed in, and this genuineness also made him an effective orator.

Mohammed Hossain says Bhasani would discourage his followers from praising him. Once when he saw a follower of him saying “Bhasani *zindabad*” meaning praise to Bhasani, he said forcefully:

"Are you my hired agent to praise me? Remember! It is not a good thing to say *zindabad* to a leader. *Zindabad* makes the leaders go astray. Praise their actions, praise the people, to save a nation..."<sup>771</sup>

Bhasani never took pleasure in praise. Likewise, he would be annoyed if his follower unduly criticized other leaders.<sup>772</sup>

Bhasani took important decisions by himself and only casually consulted his followers. He would often take a boat to the nearest river, where he would contemplate his decision in peace. Some of his followers thought he had contact with *Khidir* a legendary “Prophet of the sea.” Bhasani however never claimed to be in contact with any spiritual person. When an election neared, to the frustration of his followers, he would declare that he would boycott the election.<sup>773</sup> Shahed Ali says: “Mawlana would never make his conscience subordinate to interests of Party discipline”.<sup>774</sup>

<sup>770</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari, “Mawlana Bhasanir Bhumika,” (*The Role of Mawlana Bhasani*), (Santosh, 1978), p.1.

<sup>771</sup> Mohammed Hossain, “Mawlana Bhasanikee Jamon Dakechee” (*The Way I Saw Mawlana Bhasani*) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani)*, op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>773</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari mentioned it to me during our discussions about the way Bhasani took political decisions.

<sup>774</sup> Shahed Ali, “Mawlana Bhasanir Shannidhe” (In the Presence of Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani)*, op. cit., p. 203.

This type of dedication and outspokenness sounds great in theory as an honest opposition leader. However, out in the real world this was difficult, and sooner or later he had to deal with the consequences by either losing support of party members in favor of election or he had to do the job of establishing a new party. It seems that his stubbornness with his principles is a sign of his commitment to maintain the inner consistency of his visions in actions.

An important aspect of Bhasani's persona was that, although he was seen as a destroyer of the unjust system of government, he was also known as an institution builder.<sup>775</sup> He established many educational and philanthropic institutions in Assam and Bengal, including mosques, *musafirkhana* (traveller's hostels), hospitals, elementary and high schools, madrasas, and colleges. Therefore, he was not seen by his followers as a destroyer at all. Bhasani said:

Although I am originally a politician, establishing educational institutions and social institutions is my one of the most important responsibilities. But I don't stay with it in the administration directly. In Bengal and Assam, those institutions that were founded by me had to go through difficulties just because I was the founder. Near my house, the *Mawlana* Mohammed Ali College, I don't even go once a year to supervise it. The reason is that I don't want at least the teachers to be influenced by any high or low level politician. If I influence in this yearly

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<sup>775</sup> This is similar to what Sayyid Ahmad Khan did. Sheila McDonough says "Sayyid Ahmad Khan... held something like a theory of voluntary associations. He did not expect the state to be the main agent in implementing reform. Rather he advocated self help as a basic virtue. In his own lifetime, he organized and participated in a number of voluntary associations concerned with translation activities, educational reform, and the dispersion of scientific ideas. His educational reforms came about through his own efforts in soliciting funds and setting up the new college for Muslim students. On matters of this kind, he wanted the Muslims on their own to undertake all the activities necessary to change the way their children were educated. This meant that he did not want reforms imposed arbitrarily on people who did not want or understand them; Persuasion was central to his view of effective human relationships". Sheila McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity: A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdudi*, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1984), p.43.

meeting, next time another party will try to influence. Consequently, the teachers will not have neutrality to the political process.<sup>776</sup>

Indeed, Alamgir Kabir, the editor of the New Nation newspaper whom I had interviewed said that “Bhasani was not a destroyer at all. He was a builder of institutions and a peace loving person who served people.”<sup>777</sup>

#### Islamic University: Bhasani's Dream Project

In 1970, just before the independence of Bangladesh, Bhasani was beginning to think about establishing a university to materialize his ideas. There are such instances of Universities established by politicians of South Asia such by Syed Ahmad's Aligarh University, Rabindranath Tagore's Santhi Nikhaton, Baneras Hindu University, Khalsa Sikh University etc. Mawlana Mohammed Ali's Jamia Millia Islamia (Islamic National University). Bhasani must have been inspired by such examples. Bhasani proposed the name as the Islamic University.

In 1974 when Mujibur Rahman came to inaugurate the Mohammed Ali College in Tangail, Bhasani also proposed the university project. Mujib suggested the name should be Bhasani University. In reply Bhasani said: “This is impossible. This is the end of it in the beginning. With the name Bhasani to begin with it is *nafsania* (egocentrism)” What he meant is that starting with the name Bhasani University by Bhasani himself would be a matter of egocentrism, therefore; it would not fulfill his wishes.<sup>778</sup>

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<sup>776</sup> Irfanul Bari, “Pakistanae Mawlana Bhasanir Shesh Shofer” (Mawlana Bhasani's Last Trip To Pakistan) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 271.

<sup>777</sup> Alamgir Kabir the editor of the New Nation Newspaper in Dhaka was interviewed by me in June 1995 in Dhaka at the New Nation office.

<sup>778</sup> Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, op. cit., p. 585.

Bhasani closely worked with Mawlana Mohammed Ali during the *Khilafat* movement days. It is possible that he was influenced by Mohammed Ali's examples.

About Mawlana Mohammed Ali's Jamia Millia Islamia:

...two dominant trends joined hands and contributed towards in the birth of Jamia. One was the anti-colonial Islamic activism and the other was the pro-independence aspiration of the politically radical section of western educated Indian Muslim intelligentsia. In the political climate of 1920, the two trends gravitated together with Mahatma Gandhi as a catalyst. The anti-colonial activism signified by the *Khilafat* and the pro-independence aspirations symbolised by the non-cooperation movement of the Indian National Congress helped to harness creative energies and the subsequent making of Jamia Millia Islamia.<sup>779</sup>

Perhaps during the later part of Bangladesh period due to the political instability, widespread corruption during Mujib's rule, Bhasani as an honest leader and a believer of democracy must have felt questions about how to persuade his countrymen to be good? How to get rid of the bad when they are not good? How to get people educated to make them good citizens? How and why leaders get to power? Bhasani must have thought about the methods; whether to use persuasion or violence to get to those goals. Bhasani must have also realized that fundamentalism breed through Madrassa education does not solve the problems of Muslims. The use of violence by Communists or killing Mujib and his family by the military coup leaders does not work it either. He must have thought that training citizens to be honest to believe in persuasion is the most appropriate way to get to the goal. To him this requires spiritual education. Thus, he did not accept atheist solution, or "Islamic fundamentalism." Bhasani came up with this plan to establish this university to train leaders to be honest, democratic and also to help make Bangladesh

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<sup>779</sup> For details see <<http://jmi.nic.in/HistoryofJamia.htm>> June 6, 2003.

become self reliant and remove poverty.<sup>780</sup> In a statement outlining the principles and plans he said it has two missions: Firstly, educational: to learn Language, Literature, Science, History, Geography, Philosophy, Economics and Sociology. Secondly; teach students the welfare of humanity and to be just, tolerant, honest and to learn both patriotism and internationalism.<sup>781</sup> It is not clear from our research that if he followed Jamie's curriculum. Jamie's modern curriculum emphasizes on general education.

Bhasani's curriculum seems more intensive and specific on certain things than any other general university curriculum. To him the Islamic university students will try to understand the meaning of the Quran and Hadith but it will be different from the traditional Madrasa. This type of education instead of creating the *ulama* type of leaders will create revolutionaries like Abu Dhar Gaffari, Ali (the Prophet's companion), who was "the lover of knowledge." The students will also respect great international leaders Abraham Lincoln, Mao Tse Tung and the other great leaders and adopt some of their ideas.

Bhasani always recommended it to be self reliant. Bhasani wanted the University's residential students to produce everything they need within the campus except buying edible oil and salt for cooking. Bhasani was frustrated with traditional education that created dependence. To him this ideal type of education will create dedicated, devotional and creative people. The project emphasized on character development and self reliance that are Sufi ideals indeed.

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<sup>780</sup> Mukul Chowdhury, "Mawlana Bhasanir Shapna, Islamic University" (Mawlana Bhasani's Dream, Islamic University) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 800.

<sup>781</sup> For more on this see <<http://jmi.nic.in/HistoryofJamia.htm>> July 8, 2003. The Jamia curriculum at the time of Mohammed Ali is not available here but the present curriculum

Bhasani's plan to teach students for self sufficiency plan probably has been influenced by Gandhi. We have no evidence to prove it except that Vashani was familiar with Gandhi's nationwide call for "March towards Village" to have India develop self sufficiency. In this proposed university, to develop self sufficiency Bhasani wanted students to educate themselves in technology, horticulture, husbandry and carpentry. Students were suggested to have compulsory physical education as well.

Bhasani suggested that there should also be an Academy for the study of Sufism, Academy for comparative Religion and Ideologies, and Academy for the Study of African, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern Studies centre. Perhaps Bhasani's love and trust for Sufi training convinced him that such studies would be useful in their lives. So is also he recommended the usefulness of knowing other religious and secular ideologies. Historically, most revivalist Muslim leaders tend to emphasize on learning only about their tradition. This seems very unusual of a Muslim leader. His recommendation to study the other societies where people are going through similar changes also shows his concerns for people facing similar problems.

This project developed in 1974, two years before his death seems a reflection of his continued emphasis on his religious and philosophical views and past experiences resulting in his concerns and the choice of the curriculum.

Maksud says that there was proposed American donation to start the project but Bhasani declined such proposal.<sup>782</sup> Realizing its no future, before his death he regretted for not starting the project early in life. In 1980 many leading politicians urged the

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includes Education, Humanities & Languages, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. Engineering & Technology.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

government to finance the project but to no avail.<sup>783</sup> Thus it remained a Bhasani's dream project.<sup>784</sup>

Despite the name and its Islamic orientation, it proposed that in this university students from every religion would be welcome and will follow their own religious tradition in the curriculum.

Bhasani's types of thinking in unity of being but respect for religious and cultural differences made him remain the leader of leaders for generations in this region. It is interesting to note that unlike other Muslim religious leaders Bhasani never gave *fatwa*, perhaps because he was a Bengali Sufi mystic, or because in the Bengali context, *fatwa* is ineffective in political matters. Bari records his conversation about *fatwa*, with reporters:

It was on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1970. It was a formal meeting with the press eventually turned into an informal discussion. Bhasani started to add humor to his discussions. A talkative woman reporter asked Bhasani, "Yes *hujur*, did you ever give *fatwa* in marriage affairs?" The Mawlana said, "Only once I had a problem like this, and finding it troublesome I did *towbah* (repentance). It was in the Sherpur of the Bogra district. The rule is, once the husband divorces the wife [in three stages rather than one] if he wishes to take her back she must get married to another man [a process known in the law as "*tahlil*"].. I gave her in marriage to a very old man but on the condition that the man divorces her the next day. The man declined to do it. In this we became very upset. Finding no other alternative, I quickly left the place to my safety." Everybody laughed at hearing the story.<sup>785</sup>

In this as a Bengali leader he was different from other followers of Islam. Perhaps this type of outlook by Bhasani was the reason why the *ulamá'* with *Madrassa* degrees called him *Munshii Bhasani* ("munshí" literally means scribe) in Bengali context *Munshi*

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<sup>783</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 586.

<sup>784</sup> In 1995 instead of a University I have seen only a High School at Santosh. Like many other High Schools and Colleges Bhasani established the school also continued to function after his death.

<sup>785</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari, "Pakistane Mawlana Bhasanir Shas Shofer" (Mawlana Bhasani's Last Trip to Pakistan) in Quayyum (ed.) *Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani* (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), *op. cit.*, p. 269.



means "half educated busy scholar."<sup>786</sup> Bhasani was seen not educated in the law, as this does require some formal study, as in the Madrasa. Indeed, as a mystic, the law was not of central concern to him, apart from the basic rituals.

Bhasani was liked by some and disliked by others. While peasants and labourers, many of whom were his Sufi followers loved him, the rulers in general, the *ulama* and the rightist politicians disliked him. While his Sufi and left minded followers and sometime nationalists for strategic reasons supported him, his Sufi followers remained as the core group to carry on his political activities.

Why did Bhasani appeal to people?

He was unpretentious and maintained honesty throughout his political career in his activities. Korban Ali, one of his spiritual disciples who later became a famous politician in Bangladesh, narrates an incident from 1964. During this time Bhasani was the president of NAP and after the conference of party workers he had the chance to meet Bhasani:

I touched his feet and put 10 dollars in his hand, and as I was about to leave, instead of keeping the money he raised his hand, drawing the attention of his followers. "Gentleman, look! The son-in-law of a disciple gave this money to me. Bhasani is not going to keep it for himself. His wife and children are also not going to eat from it. Bhasani has few hundred thousand disciples. They donate (money) without hesitation. This money helps in the financing of the schools, colleges, and other institutions. But the government says, "Where Bhasani does get so much money?" If Bhasani used this money for himself, like other leaders, he would have by now 24 two story buildings in Karachi and Dhaka.<sup>787</sup>

Korban Ali cites another example:

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<sup>786</sup> A. Z. M. Shamsul Alam "Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani" (The Destitute Leader Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 402.

<sup>787</sup> Korban Ali, "Srititae Mawlana Bhasani" (Mawlana Bhasani in My Memory) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p.190.

Bhasani's son-in-law Ataur Rahman was a school teacher. Bhasani had no time to think about the welfare of his family. This is just after the independence of Pakistan. Mohammed Kurban Ali said to Bhasani, "Ataur Rahman does not have a job, only by name he is a teacher in the Dhalhari school. He does not receive salary regularly. If you had helped to get a job for him it was going to be good for his survival. Bhasani replied "I understand that he needs a job, I also understand that if I make a phone call to Abul Hossain government there is going to be a job for him but all my life I did not do anything for me. I did not approach anybody. Now, at this stage of my life it will not be wise to ask for favor for my son in law. ...Moreover, someone who can not find a job by his own ability, he will not be able to keep a job managed by another person."<sup>788</sup>

Although the story is narrated by his follower it shows him as a very unusual type among his contemporaries in Bengali society and was only possible because of his strong faith in his principles and his commitment to serving people.

Bhasani preferred to use the Bengali language, rather than Arabic for teaching Islam to people. "It is only a language," he said. "Through Bengali one can say great things about God (and) through Arabic one can speak against God."<sup>789</sup> He spoke in plain Bengali with a mixture of borrowed Arabic words.<sup>790</sup> Unlike the normativist *alim* like Maududi, to whom Arabic as well as Urdu would be sacred languages, Bhasani's interpretation was different. This way of looking at Arabic only as a language worked perfectly well with the Bengali people who are proud of their language and their culture. After all, the Bengali people fought against their co-religionist Pakistanis on the grounds of their cultural autonomy which Bhasani championed. However, this research shows that personally, Bhasani was a pious Muslim. He was a Muslim leader of a different type to most who were active in the region. It was his use of liberal Islamic religious spirit to serve people that made him an effective leader in Bengali society.

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<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*, p.181.

<sup>789</sup> Irfanul Bari said Bhasani gave great importance to the language of the masses.

<sup>790</sup> Irfanul Bari gave me details on this topic.

Because of the nature of his ideas Gaziul Haq says, "Bhasani was like a shelter for small politicians of all parties."<sup>791</sup> Allowing various progressive elements in his party to struggle for change in a diverse society made him popular to the masses.

Bhasani combined the vocabulary of religion with a political message. He brought religion in politics but not religious dogmatism. He fought against superstition. To the *Mawlana*, religion is the instrument against injustice and a means to a progressive goal.<sup>792</sup>

Sufi orders are present and active in every part of Bengal. Bengali people regularly visit those centres for *Baraka* (blessings). Sufis are normally seen there as saintly people. Tombs serve as sacred places. McDonough says: "They serve as local shrines or places where believers could come to take part in ritual devotional exercise, or to find spiritual counselling."<sup>793</sup> Bhasani maintained his *Darbar hall* for devotional exercise – inspired chanting and sometimes also movement - -called *dhikr* and for counselling purposes. Bhasani's Sufi understanding of religion in politics and its successful use was only possible in this less strenuously Islamicized Bengali society, with its history of Sufi liberalism that we described in Chapter 2.

Sufis consider the Prophet as the first Sufi because of his honesty and willingness to dedicate his life to the service of people. Bhasani followed his Sufi ideals in imitation of the Prophet. The Prophet himself lived among the people and conducted the social and

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<sup>791</sup> Gaziul Haq, "Akti Asroy" (A Shelter) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>792</sup> Abdul Matin, "Oporajaye Mawlana Bhasani" (The Undeclared Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., pp. 490-491.

<sup>793</sup> Sheila McDonough, Muslim Ethics and Modernity, A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought Of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdudi, op. cit., p. 19.

political affairs.<sup>794</sup> Desmond Stewart says about the Prophet, "Throughout his life, even after he had become the absolute ruler of a powerful new state he remained basically simple in tastes; it was said that he even mended his own clothes."<sup>795</sup>

Bhasani, following the Prophet's model, a family man, lived among his people, and like the Prophet performed his socio-religious duty by fighting against tyrannical governments. He did this to please God.

Like the Prophet in Mecca, he was a preacher and an instructor, whose aim was to reform and improve himself and others. Bhasani opposed the unjust rule of the upper class in Assam and in Pakistan, but unlike the Prophet, who in Medina became a ruler of a state, Bhasani as usual, refused to take power in the independent Bangladesh. His work was to organize conferences, demonstrations, fasting, lead processions, and to distribute relief materials to the affected areas, and establish educational institutions.

Without becoming an elected official his work kept the government in check. Perhaps it was his style of a Bengali peasant leader, the Bengali Sufi nature of his leadership. He functioned as the moral conscience of his people.

Mujibur Rahman an associate of Bhasani, describes him in the following way:

Even after getting the chance to come to power, he led the life of a saint. By sacrificing the comfort of this world, he practiced the daily life of the last Prophet. He did not hesitate to fight for the rights of the dispossessed keeping his life at risk.<sup>796</sup>

Mohammed Azraf calls him an Islamic humanist. He says:

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<sup>794</sup> Ibid., Also see Abdullah -bin sayeed Jalalabadi" Bhasani Charitra Nabijir Provab (The Reflection of Prophet character in Bhasani's Life in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 831.

<sup>795</sup> Desmond Stewart, Early Islam. (New York: Time Incorporated, 1967), p. 19.

<sup>796</sup> Mujibur Rahman, "Byokthi Bhasani" (Bhasani the Man) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 286.

His mind was formed with Islamic principles ... (when faced with) oppression or injustice, he jumped to oppose it. For this reason, even when he was involved in politics he was fully committed in Islamic humanism. That is why I have seen he did not see politics different from humanism. In the same meeting (where) he was discussing politics, he did not forget to find ways to bring welfare to people's lives. He was very courageous. He never feared to be in the front row of a procession. I tried to understand him deeply. His principle was very strong.... He never compromised with his principle.<sup>797</sup>

Bhasani was gentle, amiable and friendly. Bhasani was familiar with al-Ghazali's ideas. Al-Ghazali quoting the Hadith said: the Prophet (God bless him and give him peace) also said: -You will not win people with your wealth. What will win them are a cheerful face and a good character. ...<sup>798</sup>

Bhasani called himself a peasant.<sup>799</sup> He managed to fight for peasants' rights and convinced the Bengalis that he was above all one of them. Bhasani lived an ordinary life, yet he was rarely ordinary. In all the above he probably had the strength of a "mystic blend of royal preserves" and the "common touch." But his popularity also stemmed from something deeper. Abdus Satter a Bengali writer says Bhasani used to give him advice

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<sup>797</sup> Mohammed Azraf, "Bhasani Ak Onanyo Baiktito" (Bhasani a Unique Personality) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>798</sup> McDonough, Muslim Ethics and Modernity, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>799</sup> Mohammed Hossain says that in his retreat in Santosh, Tangail Bhasani was "a gentle *pir*." Bangladesh as a rural delta country comprised mainly of peasant population where Bhasani lived as if like a hermit sitting in his hut. Mohammed Hossain narrates a story, "one day, a person was filling out a form for Bhasani, to apply for a passport to go to haj. The interviewer already filled out some of the questions familiar questions himself, the first question in the form he filled out in the name column was Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and his father's name was also completed and without asking Bhasani he also wrote for Bhasani's profession as "politics." Bhasani sitting next to the interviewer "got sarcastically angey," "Can politics be a profession for someone like me?" "Correct it and write my profession as peasant." Quoted in Mohammed Hossain, in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 237. Rajia Majid also expresses her similar observation about Bhasani in her Bhasanike Jemon Dakechee" ("The way I Saw Bhasani") in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p.162.

about how to be a successful writer. Satter was inspired by Bhasani to be a writer. Satter says:

If you are not inspired by a vision, your work will not survive." He said in that ideology there should be humanism, supported by the Quran and *Sunna* so that no narrow mindedness touches anybody. Even when he advised about Islam he did not tolerate religious narrow mindedness.<sup>800</sup>

Serajul Islam Chowdhury an educationist says about Bhasani that he was not a hypocrite:

I will bring a smile in your face." Bhasani's promises resounded and he never betrayed his people in this struggle. Many politicians said the same things and made the same promises, and thus ascended to power. They smiled but the people cried again and again, as the suffering increased. Bhasani did not compromise. In this he was a mass leader. He was not a symbol of hypocrisy but of hope for the common people.<sup>801</sup>

Bhasani's strength also lies in other areas such as his persuasiveness. Syed Irfanul Bari the editor of Haq Khota said:

Bhasani was a powerful and a passionate speaker and a master communicator: When he talked the words were arranged in such a way that they were as if a gardener was making a garland out of flowers by skillfully arranging them on a thread in order and people wanted to hear him. His verbal adroitness and illusory allure, held people spell bound by the thousands in outdoor meetings that lasted as long as three hours.<sup>802</sup>

Persuasion depends on trust; there seem to be no doubt that it was his follower's trust in him that made him powerful. In addition one wonders how he could remain active for so long. Among politicians "endurance is the most objective gauge of success in the

<sup>800</sup> Abdus Satter, "Mawlana Bhasani O Ami" (Mawlana Bhasani and Me) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 831.

<sup>801</sup> Sherajul Islam Chowdhury, "Mawlana Bhasanir Bumika" (The Political Role of Mawlana Bhasani) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed, Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., pp. 474-480.

<sup>802</sup> Irfanul Bari described Bhasani's style of public speech to me during an interview with him in July 1995. Also see for similar descriptions of Bhasani's style of deliberation in Saiful Islam.

arena of power politics." Bhasani took up the initiative to lead the Farakka March against India's Farakka Dam project at the age of 94 a few months before his death. In front of the Rajshahi Madrasa, (as if like the prophet's last speech at the Arafat ground) in Bhasani's last speech among other things he said:

I do not know what I will leave for the poor peasants but one thing I do know is that I betrayed them. The assurance I gave them, I could not keep. By getting their votes, each time I helped leaders attain power who later betrayed their promises. By forgetting the interests of the peasants, they themselves gained huge properties.<sup>803</sup>

Bhasani remained outspoken all along. This made him a debatable figure in politics.

Max Weber says:

Politics ...takes [of a politician of] both passion and perspective. Certainly, all historical experience confirms the truth -that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible. But to do that a man must be a leader, and not only a leader but a hero as well,...Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say 'In spite of all!' has the calling for politics.<sup>804</sup>

Born and raised in Bengal when medieval patterns of thinking were seriously questioned by leaders, in the midst of the suffering of the Bengali peasants, Bhasani fought for their rights, and lived with them. He had combined absolute values with his touch in the present- -a modern man with his medieval touch. Research shows that people misunderstood him. However, he had not only passion but perspective as well.

Shadinata, Bhasani, Bharat (Independence, Bhasani, India) (Dhaka: Ayon Publications), (in Bengali), p. 6.

<sup>803</sup> Mohammed Mosleuddin Joarder, "Nipirito Manoboter Mukti Sangramee Mawlana Bhasani", (Mawlana Bhasani in the Liberation Struggle of the Oppressed Humanity) in Quayyum (ed.) Mazlu'm Jononeta Mawlana Bhasani (The Great Leader of the Oppressed Mawlana Bhasani), op. cit., p. 706.

<sup>804</sup> Girth and Mills, Max Weber's Essays in Sociology. op.cit., p.128. (Emphasis added).

Balance between the two led him to rise above. He was genuinely a Bengali spiritual leader and his use of religion in politics, as a leader and to fulfill his duty, worked as if he was a Bengali companion of the Prophet!

### SECTION 3: CONCLUSIONS

The South Asian sub-continent experienced phenomenal changes especially after the events of 1857. The research for this thesis shows how, throughout these shifts, Bhasani fought the forces of history, created new history and became recognized himself as an important part of Bengali history. In my research for chapters in Part 1 and 2 of the thesis, I found that he emerged over and over again in the pages of history, often as a central figure. Responded to the circumstances he emerged and was swept into the vortex of the politics of his time. He sometimes subsided to a politically obscure position but inevitably reemerged. This trend began in 1929 and continued until his death in 1976.

In his political career Bhasani did not seek to head the government. Nor was he interested in power as an expression of some kind of personal empire or for personal aggrandizement. He sought the kind of power a legislator might possess. He was given the title, "Janotar Chabuk" meaning Whip of the Masses.<sup>805</sup> In this role, he had as it were two over-lapping set of followers--those who responded to him as a *pir* and those who responded to his political positions. Unlike traditional leaders, Bhasani showed humility and felt sorry that those leaders he helped to elect to bring change betrayed him and he was not able to fulfill his promises. This is different from those who claim their success in being able to leave their names in history.

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<sup>805</sup> For details see Janotar Chabuk, Mawlana Bhasani (Whip of the Masses Mawlana Bhasani), Souvenir, 1980.



From our analysis of Bhasani's leadership we have seen that scholars who failed to understand his vision used faulty analogies. Faulty analogy is often accompanied by a "poor understanding of the history" and of "the context." They essentially assume Bhasani worked with the Communists therefore he was a Communist; that he dressed like a Muslim fundamentalist so he was a "fanatically religious person"; he opposed Indian policies, and most "fundamentalists" oppose Indian policies therefore he was "a religious fundamentalist." Further analogies by such observers that what worked for "fundamentalists" worked for him, so he looked like a "fundamentalist." The comparison does nothing to prove the point. The arguments sound logical and reasonable but they lack factual evidence.

What is distinctive about his approach? Bhasani was confident in his culture, language and to do welfare for his people. Bhasani's brand of Islamic mysticism allowed him to be Bengali Muslim leader humble with followers from every religion. As a Sufi *murshed* (teacher), believing in syncretism, his ideas pulled him closer to secularism than to religious "fundamentalism" and he was successful in establishing his political authority. Given his experience of Bengal as a society comprised of both Hindus and Muslims and his adoption of a universalistic policy, he demonstrated himself to be a progressive leader that tried to "rationalize" his version of Islam by a reinterpretation of society called "Islamic living" with a lofty aim to establish a secular democratic society. He reminded the politicians of the Bengali context with its differences in language and culture.

In the chapters on the Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh periods we have seen, governments, populist leaders, religious and other rightist leaders detested him. In 1957 he was attacked by the followers of the rightist branch of the Awami League. In 1970 he

was even physically attacked by Jama'ati Islami supporters in West Pakistan, however, people in general responded particularly to him. In this research what is clear is that *rubúbiyah* as a universal philosophy allowed him to work with people of various orientations but in the end, only the leftist followers and his Sufi followers were his core groups. Despite his association with the Communists, he consistently showed his belief in Islam.

Sufis are seen as Godly people and in Bengali society they are trusted as honest in disposition. As a Sufi leader he continued to practice with his Sufi followers the devotional exercises in his *Darbar* Hall. He lived in rural Bengal among peasants, and honestly fought for their rights. This type of leadership led his people to trust him as one of them and people responded to his appeal. In addition, we have also seen in the thesis that Islam served Bhasani's politics as a means of mobilization (communicating ideas through the use of religious idiom, utilizing religious institutions, such as the Sufi orders, as a way of supporting and spreading political activity) and as a source for personal models or techniques (e.g. using the model of the companion of the Prophet or the *pir* to learn not only about what one's goals should be, but also how to bring them about, how to exercise leadership).

The sources of knowledge in this research on Bhasani are mainly Bhasani's recorded or transcribed speeches, as well as informal discussions of Bhasani recorded by his spiritual followers and his contemporaries. This is supported by comments and observations by scholars and his associates to understand the contexts in which he worked.

His critic's failure to understand his vision of *rubúbiyah*, as an Islamic humanist religious perspective was indeed the cause of confusion. They also failed to understand

the special meaning of *jihad* as referring to class struggle for example by Bhasani, and the resultant biases might have influenced his critics' responses. It appears from what they said that they did not take time to study Bhasani. Based on the above analysis, the findings of the research are strong enough to deny the claims that Bhasani was an "opportunist", "a flip-flop", and that he had "no direction in politics."

It is true that politics is about power. From the research it is my understanding that, unlike other traditional politicians, Bhasani's principles dictated that he never came to power but fought for justice. He never encouraged anyone to write his biography, he discouraged propaganda about him by his followers. He discouraged his followers from establishing a college or Madrassa in his name.

Bhasani never founded a political party with his *rubûbiyah* philosophy. After all in a Sufi influenced Bengali society, Bengali language and culture were given priority over religious matters in politics. He realized that a religious political party would not attract people or he did not have the inclination to start one because he never intended to come to power. Despite his involvement in politics this reflects Bhasani's Sufi mode of action. It is his way of practicing ideas in action. It is a different model of a *pir*, related to the type of people he communicated with. Some of this unusual political behavior genuinely caused confusion about his motives. The truth of the matter is that this confusion is a result of the unorthodox style of his use of ideas. This style in politics is easy for informed Bengalis especially his devoted followers to understand; however, it is not easy for others who are not particularly familiar with his style or Bengali cultural assumptions. In Chapter 7 the data used to decode Bhasani's nature indicates that he was an idealist for whom religion was an end in itself. He knew his duty was to serve God and politics for him was his performance of religious duty.

Smith says "Each region of the world has its dynamic that must be understood on its own terms..."<sup>806</sup> As a vision mainly rooted in Sufi tradition, Bhasani's religious and philosophical ideas (explored in this thesis) ask for the selflessness and the destruction of the ego. He offered help whether or not the person in need desired it. He saw providing help to others as a way of helping himself to achieve grace or a place in heaven. For this he sacrificed comfort for him and his family, for he thought he would be rewarded only in the next world for his good deeds. He considered it as his "religious duty" his performing of *hukkul Allah* and *hukkul Ibad*, indeed a lofty question about the meaning of existence. Bhasani preferred to live with peasants, with lofty ideas of bringing happiness to the poor. He found "the mind of God" in his *rubūbiyah* philosophy, seeing in "the order and consistency of the world of nature the result of active mind."<sup>807</sup>

What is the character of Bhasani's particular sense of the connection between religion and politics? The religious dimension is present in Bhasani's life and works in several ways: in his sense of calling -- as a kind of mystic/prophet; in his vision of a human community not rent by divisions, oppression, etc.; in the Islamic rhetoric of his discourse.; and in his sense of being called in the present to respond to certain realities what he felt called upon to respond. This latter feature seemed especially important: he felt need to respond to current exigencies.

My understanding from this research is that Bhasani's long life and service to his people stands as a testimony to the human willingness to sacrifice comfort, security and

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<sup>806</sup> Sheldon Smith and Philip D. Young, Cultural Anthropology, Understanding a world in Transition, (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), p. 366. Similar views could also be seen in Dale Eickelman, The Middle East, An Anthropological Approach, (New Jersey: Princeton Hall, 1981).

<sup>807</sup> Harold H. Titus, et. al. Living Issues in Philosophy, (New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), p. 271.

power in order to help less fortunate people. This is the religious character of Bhasani's political leadership. My conclusion then is that this is his originality.

In response to South Asian Islam's internal decay and external domination Bhasani used Islamic symbols politically, as many others have done and are doing in modern times. But his religio-political vision was markedly different from both – emphasizing pluralism, democracy and tolerance. The one thing he might have had in common with the Muslim religious leader's current today is “anti-imperialist” tone. Bhasani's kind of political Islam, it seems, is hardly to be found today. Its possibilities have been submerged – perhaps under influence of the perceived threat of the West. By a narrower vision that emphasizes the reconstruction of conservative social values as a bulwark against outsiders, rather than local reform and liberation.

In pursuance of this picture, every indication shows that not enough attention has been devoted nationally in Bangladesh, regionally in South Asia or internationally, to the understanding of the real Bhasani. In the absence of an accurate account of his life, much ingenuity had been directed by clever politicians or less-serious scholars towards discrediting the contribution of Bhasani. Previous works have been either apologetic or superficial and do not go into depth of the matter.

As stated in Chapter 1, the present work is not a biography of Bhasani, nor does it cover every aspect of Bhasani's life. Therefore, I make no claim to a complete explanation or narration of his life or of his work and activities. Much less, it is intended to deal with him as a charismatic leader, or his other activities. Clearly there can be alternative approaches to understanding Bhasani in those regards. In this sense, my purpose is a more modest one: I have demonstrated the particular type of religious and

philosophical basis Bhasani had and traced its development in different periods of his political career.

Bhasani's political career had been a long and exciting one. In this thesis Bhasani's message, his purposes, his approach, the historicity of all those details are analyzed for their unique place in history. I felt it might be relevant to the understanding of the ideological conflicts, intellectual and spiritual perplexities of our time, which Bhasani understood in his own way and communicated to his people.

My research on Bhasani over the past 10 long years has enabled me to collect an immense amount of evidence and information that has helped to rediscover him through all the above issues that I brought to light. Bhasani after his death is regarded as a politician and a Muslim saint. But most of all he what he represents is an icon of an honest leader, existing among dishonest partisan leaders. He indeed remains powerful, even after his death and this compelling reason requires that he be understood.

Bhasani knew that he was misunderstood by many people perhaps because of his spiritual disposition to keep things "Inwardly Hidden, and Outwardly Manifest"; a characteristic of God stated in the Quran that Sufis like Bhasani practiced in their own lives. He predicted that only a clever researcher would be able to understand him.<sup>808</sup> I hope that from my many years of research, I have brought out at least some of the characteristics of the real Bhasani and the Islamic perspective he used to communicate with his people which scholars and political observers failed to notice.

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<sup>808</sup> Bhasani was aware of his critics' claims that he did not have any "direction in politics." When I asked Irfanul Bari "What did he think about it?" Bari said Bhasani was aware of it. Bhasani once predicted that "Only a clever researcher would be able to reveal his true identity."

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX: A

#### Bhasani Family Tree

Bhasani was born in Bengal and studied in Deoband, Bihar. In Assam he began his political career. Bhasani married four times, each time in Bengal.

His wives were: Alima Khatun, Mahmuda Khatun, Hamida Khanom and Aklima Khatun.

His first wife, Alima Khatun had four children: Azizul Haq, Razia Khanum, Abu Nasser Khan Bhasani and Golam Kibria Khan. Abu Nasser Khan was interviewed by the author in 1988. He was a minister in Ziaur Rahman's government and died in 1991.

His second wife, Mahmuda Khatun, died within six months of the marriage and therefore left no children.

Bhasani's third wife was from Bogura in Bangladesh. Her name was Hamida Khanom. She had three children and died in 1964. Khan Mohammed Abu Bakkar Bhasani, Chowdhury Anwara Khanom Bhasani, and Monowara Khanum Bhasani are the children from this marriage.

According to Syed Maksud, while the first was a regular marriage, the others were political, especially his marriage to Aklima Khatun from Tangail. This marriage was necessary to establish his residency in Tangail during the colonial period. From 1947 onward he lived in Santosh with his first wife Alima Khatun.

Source: Syed Abul Maksud, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Basani, (Bengali), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994.

## APPENDIX B: A MAP OF INDIA, PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH



### APPENDIX C: NASIRUD-DIN BAGDADI

The following text about Bhasani's *pir* is adapted from Mohammed Yahya Tamizi, Sufi Movements in Eastern India, (Delhi: Idarab-i-Adabiyat, 1992) (emphasis added) p. 109.

Hazrat Syed Nasirud-Din *pir* Sahib was an important Sufi of the Goalpara district. His name has been recorded among those who preached the doctrine of Islam to the people of this region. This savant of Islam was the son of Hazrat Qurban Ali who had come to India from Bagdad. It is narrated by his followers that he first came to Bombay and then migrated to Uttar Pradesh and lived there for a number of years. Uttar Pradesh, especially Aligarh at that time was humming with social and literary activities of Sir Syed Ahmed (1817-1898A.D.) the founder of Mohammedan Oriental College, now Aligarh Muslim University. Harat *pir* Baghdadi joined Sir Syed Ahmad in collecting funds for the said college.

Having finished his job at Aligarh he came to Calcutta and Sundarbans (West Bengal), and from there he came to Sirajgonj in the district of Pabna (now Bangladesh) he got married and lived for sometime. Then he came to Mymensingh where he lived for many years, and had property with residential quarters. He had many followers and disciples and followers at Sherajgonj, Mymensing and throughout Bengal. From Mymensingh he moved to Katarihara or Jeleswar at a distance of six miles from Lakhimpur in the Goalpara district (Assam). There was practically no human habitation there at that time. He settled there. He took a plot of 800 hundred *bighas* of land from the *zamindar* of Lakhimpur with a view to constructing *Khanqah*, mosque, Madrasah and *musafir khana* and for cultivation as well. It is said that arrangement was made for food



and lodging for the followers, travellers and the poor without discrimination of caste and creed. With the passage of time the place Katarihara or Jaleswar developed socially, educationally and economically. The *pir* sahib left this world in 1342 B.S, 5th Magh Tuesday at day time (approximately in 1936 A.D.)

Bagdadi *pir* Sahib was a great and learned Sufi of *Qādiriya* Order. He was well-versed in Urdu, Persian and Arabic and composed poems in the three languages. He had a dynamic personality and possessed deep knowledge of the Holy Quran, Hadith, and *fiqh*. He always quoted freely from the Quran and the Hadith in presence of educated persons. He was proficient in economics, geography and politics also. His book, Ash'ar-e-Haqaiq, is an ample proof of his genius.

The mission of the *pir* sahib was to impart education both Islamic and modern to the people. He established the Katirinara Mazharul Uloom Senior Madrassa without taking any aid from the government. He brought qualified teachers from Sylhet and Chittagong. At present the Madrasa is under the State Madraah Board, Assam.

The *urs sharif* (death anniversary) of this saint savant and Sufi of Islam is celebrated every year on the 8th of Magh of Bengali year at his *Khanqah*.

### APPENDIX D: LAHORE RESOLUTION OF 1940

This resolution was Proposed by Moulvi A. K. Fazlul Haq, Premier of Bengal and Seconded by Chowdhury Khaliq-uz-Zaman, leader of the Muslim League Assembly Party, U.P.

“Resolved is the considered view of this session of All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following principles, viz (sic), that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the area in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and Eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous.

That adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be provided in the constitution for the minorities in these units and in the regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them, and in other parts of India where the Musalmans are in a minority, adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards shall be specifically provided in the constitution for them and other minorities for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them.

This session further authorizes the working committee to frame a scheme of constitution in accordance with these basic principles, providing for the assumption finally by the respective regions of all powers such as defense, external affairs, communication, customs, and such other matters as may be necessary. “

Source: The Paymber, vol.7, no.3 March-April, 1992, Pakistan Association of Quebec Inc. p. 9. Also quoted in Manmath Nath Das, Partition and Independence of India, (New Delhi: Vision Books), 1982, p. 62-63.

## **APPENDIX E: INFORMATION ON INDIA'S FARAKKA DAM AND ITS EFFECT ON BANGLADESH**

**Location of the Farakka Dam:** Farakka, West Bengal, India.

It is on the river Ganges. The Ganges, an international river, originates in the Himalayas and flows through Nepal, India and Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal. The Ganges and its tributaries are the major sources of water upon which Bangladesh's economy (agriculture, horticulture, maritime and other industries, etc.) is largely dependent.

### **Impact on Bangladesh**

- (1) 1/3 (one third) of Bangladesh land-mass is affected.
- (2) 30 million people's lives are affected.

### **What aspects of Bangladesh economy are affected?**

- (a) tremendous shortage of water
- (b) agriculture
- (c) fishery
- (d) navigation
- (e) forestry
- (f) power production

### **Special features of the Problem:**

\*Water level has dropped so low that deep tube wells fail to pump water needed for irrigation.

\*Increased salinity is threatening fertility of the land. Even the Sundarbans, the forest internationally known as the home of the Royal Bengal Tigers, faces the threat of extinction.

\* Hydraulic project at Bheramara, Kustia which met electricity requirements of the area, has been rendered almost non-operative due to the lack of water supply.

### **Bangladesh's future after Farakka**

Water resource experts, engineers and environmentalists predict that if the present trend is allowed to continue, a large part of Bangladesh will turn into a desert in the foreseeable future.

### **What steps have been taken to resolve the problem?**

Between 1972 and 1990, as many as 90 bilateral sessions were held. Three temporary agreements were worked out. Nothing fruitful in reality was achieved.

The issue was also raised at the UN in 1976. India bypassed the UN with a promise to solve the problem bilaterally in a fair and just way, abiding by the rules and regulations pertaining to international rivers. Bangladesh had optimistically looked forward to a permanent solution to this "life and death" problem, but nothing tangible followed.

### **What is the present status?**

There has been no agreement between the countries since 1978. Bangladesh is not getting any water. Apparently, there is no intention/ indication shown by India to solve the problem.

### **What does Bangladesh want?**

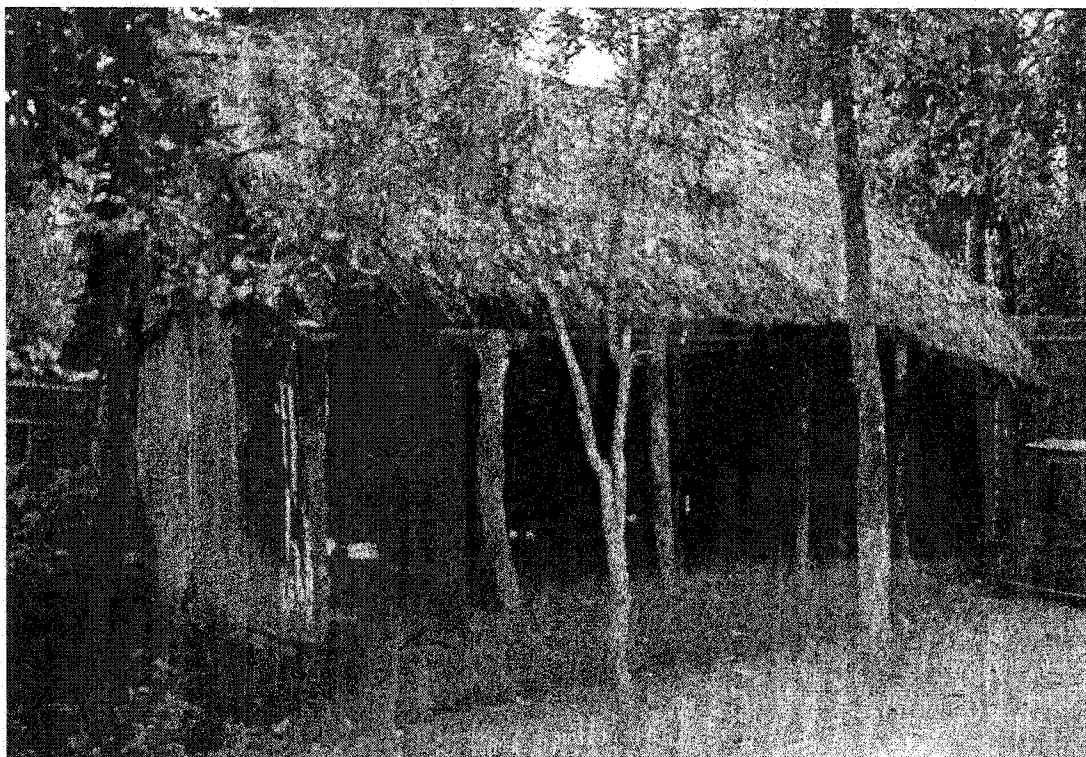
Bangladesh as do many countries and technical agencies –including those in the UN, believes that India has the sole technical leverage, and thus the primary responsibility, to reverse undesirable, inhuman effects caused by the Farakka dam by solving the problem on a permanent basis. The already experienced threat, challenge and hardship due to the Farakka dam are causing an unnecessary strain on the

relationship between the two countries. It has also become an acknowledged human rights and environmental problem.

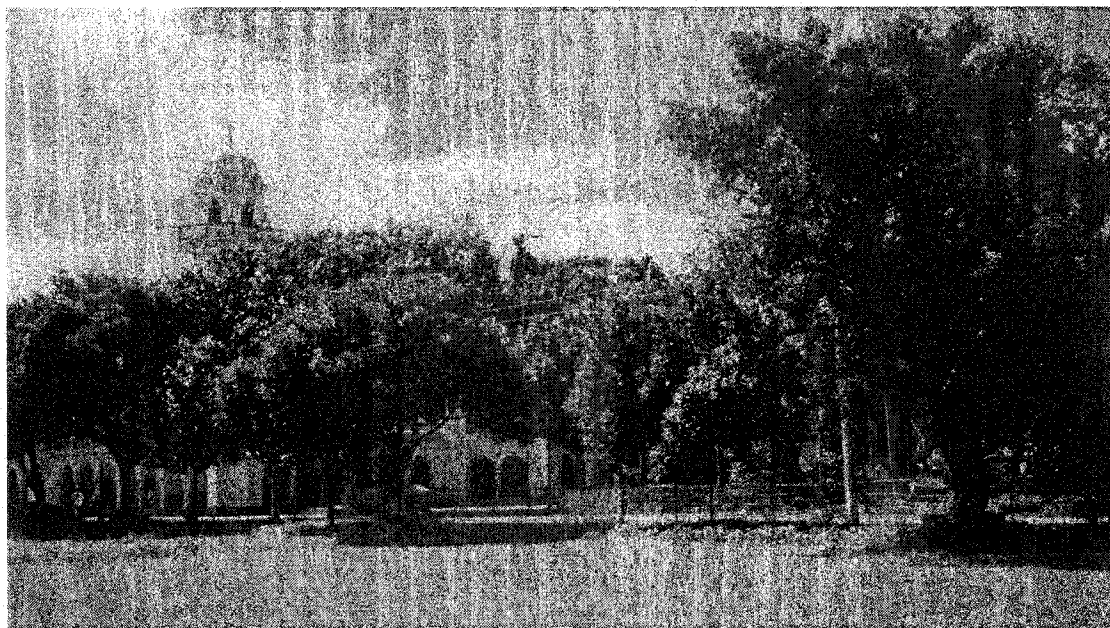
Source: This document was obtained from Atiquar Rahman Salu, President, International Farakka Committee (IFC) in New York, USA. 1996.

**APPENDIX F: SOME PHOTOGRAPHS:**

**FIGURE #1: BHASANI'S HUT AT SANTOSH, BANGLADESH IN 1995.**

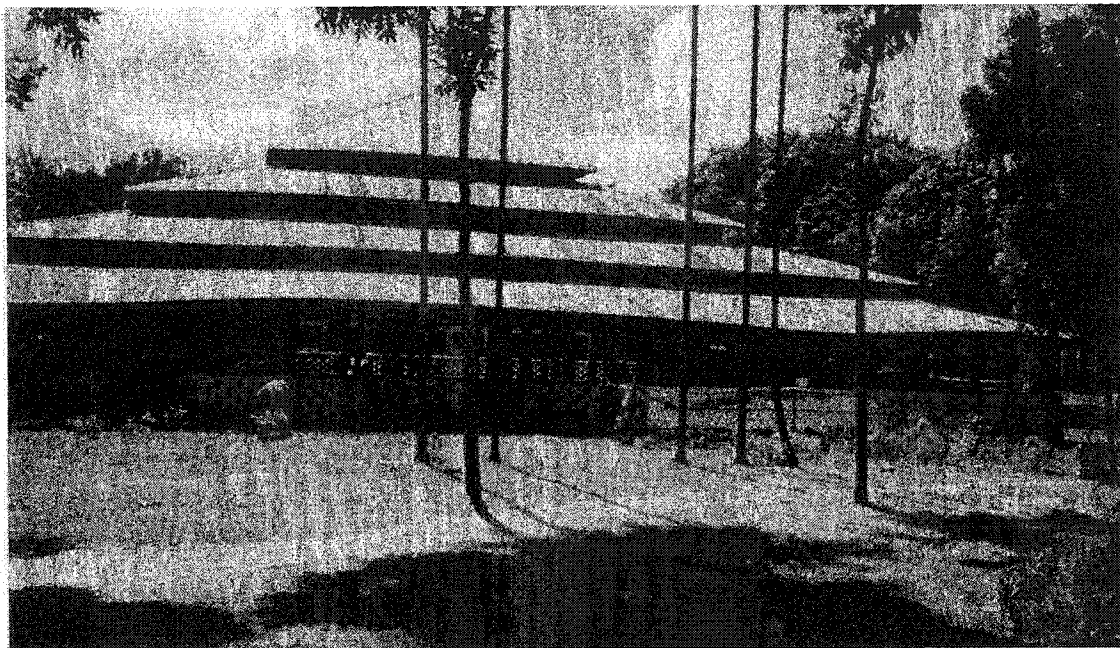


**FIGURE #2 BHASANI MAUSOLEUM AT SANTOSH, BANGLADESH**





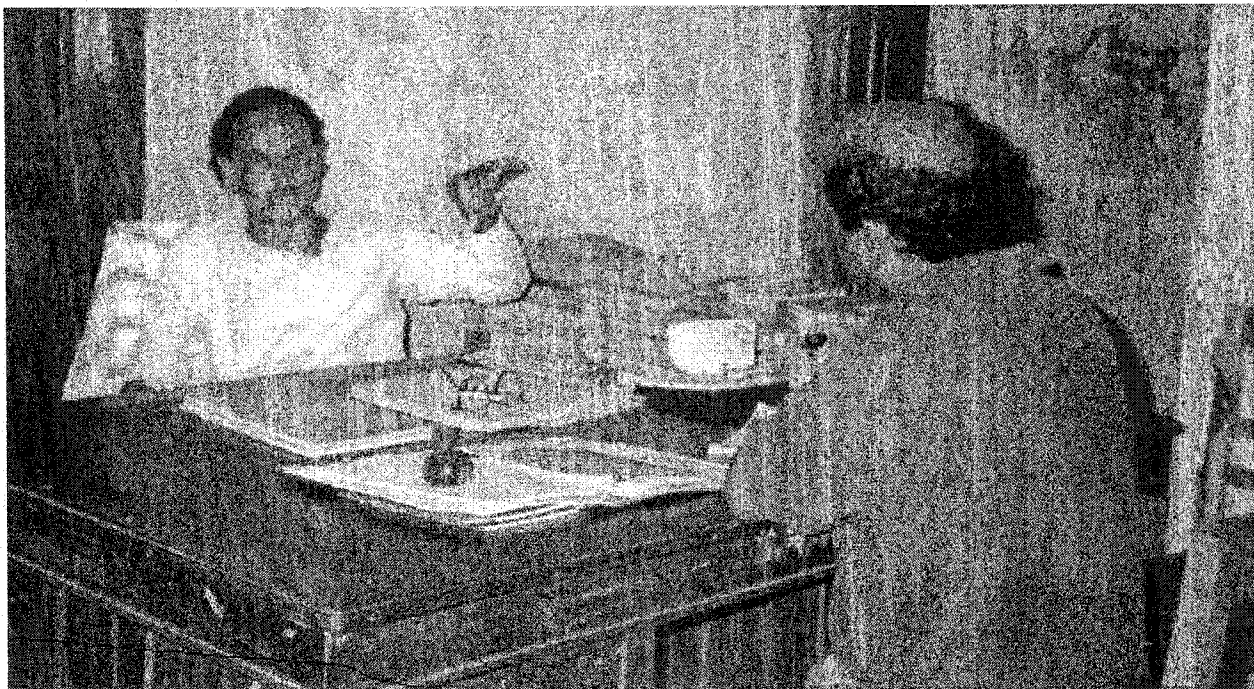
**FIGURE# 3: BHASANI'S DHARBAR HALL**



**FIGURE #4: THE AUTHOR, A MEMBER OF THE IFC, EXPLAINING THE ACTIVITIES OF THE GROUP TO NEWSPAPER REPORTERS AT THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB IN DHAKA.**



**FIGURE #5: THE AUTHOR WITH SYED IRFANUL BARI (EDITOR OF BHASANI'S HAQ KHOTA) IN 1995 AT SANTOSH, BANGLADESH.**



## APPENDIX G: TECHNICAL TERMS.

**Ana:** An ana is analogous to a penny. In other words an ana is comparable of a penny as a unit.

**Bhasani Cap:** A type of perforated, round cap made from the strands of cane, an economical cap worn in Bengal.

**Bigha:** a *bigha* is a unit of land equivalent to one third of an acre.

**Banniyas:** *Banniyas* were the middle men serving the British East India Company and the rural peasants.

**Chauki:** Wooden bed stand, four legged stool.

**Crore:** In South Asia including Bangladesh “large numerical units are usually expressed in crores.” In real terms a crore is 10 million.

**District:** In Bengali it is called *zila*, meaning major administrative subdivisions of Bangladesh.

**East Bengal:** The eastern part of the Bengal region of India. During Pakistan period it was known as East Pakistan and in 1971 it became Bangladesh.

**Fatwa:** a Muslim religious ordinance, a formal decision by law doctors.

**Gamcha:** A Bengal made towel.

**Jihad:** Means to try one’s utmost. It also means Islamic religious war.

**Kichuri:** a Bengali fast food prepared with lentil, rice with or without meat.

**Khanqah** – centres of esoteric instruction, “accessible to all people catered to their spiritual and mundane needs.”

**Lungi:** Loin cloth; in Malaysian/ Burmese, a skirt type of dress. In South East Asia it is called a Sarong. It is a rectangular piece of cloth, usually a coloured material, worn by men and women. Bhasani put on a white plain lungi.

**Line System,** a boundary in the province of Assam drawn by the Assam government in 1920 to stop Bengali settlement in Assam.

**Mazlu’m:** the oppressed.

**Murid** also known as *shagrid* is the follower of a Sufi master.

**Madrasa** means a university. Generally means an Islamic centre of learning.

**Mawláná** 'our master,' a title of respect for religious leaders, first was given to Jalal ad-Din Rumi the famous Islamic mystic by his disciples. Rumi was the author of *Masnawi*.

**Oras:** A celebration of the death anniversary of a saint where food is served.

**Pir** refers to a Muslim spiritual leader is also known as *Murshid*: In Persian *pir* literally means an elder.

**Sharia:** Islamic Law.

**Sufi:** a person who profess the mystic principles of "purity" in Arabic *tasawwuf*.

The Sufis have spoken of the threefold meaning of the paths that leads toward God: "according to the Sharia, the Muslim law, the *tariqah*, the mystical path, and the *haqiqa*, the Truth. It is purification on different levels, first from the lower qualities and the turpitude of the soul, then from the bondage of human qualities, and eventually a purification and election on the level of attributes".<sup>809</sup>

Annemarie Schimmel in her book *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* says that this is similar to the Christian tripartite division of the *via purgativae*, the *via contemplativa*, and the *via illuminativa* is, to some extent, the same as the Islamic definition of *sharia*, *tariqah*, and *haqiqa*. *Sharia*, *tariqah*, and *haqiqa* are mutually interdependent.<sup>810</sup>

Fazlur Rahman says that "Sufism claimed to lead its adepts to a direct communion with God, a thesis which the orthodox "Ulama" rejected. The religious fascination of the ideal was so powerful that Sufism, in course of time, became a religion within a religion with its own exclusive structure of ideas, practice and organization. To realize this ideal, Sufism offered a neat and concrete method according to which the novice or the seeker was taken from "station" to "station" until he shed his humanity and became divine."<sup>811</sup>

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<sup>809</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975). p.16.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 98-99.

<sup>811</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, *op.cit.*, p. 150.

The following idea about the doctrine of the Sufis and the Sufi journey were adapted from Thomas Patrick Hughes, Dictionary of Islam, Kuwait: Islamic Book Publishers, 1978.

#### The Doctrine of the Sufis.

1. God only exists. He is in all things, and all things in Him.
2. All visible and invisible beings are an emanation from Him, and are not really distinct from Him.
3. Religions are matters of indifference: they however serve as leading to realities.
4. It is God who fixes the will of man: man therefore is not free in his actions.
5. The soul existed before the body, and is confined within the latter as in a cage. Death, therefore, should be the object of the wishes of the Sufi, for it is then that he returns to the bosom of Divinity.
6. It is by the metempsychosis that souls which have not fulfilled their destination here below are purified and become worthy of reunion with God.
7. Without the grace of God, which the Sufis call *Fayazanu llah*, or *Fazlu llah*; no one can attain to this spiritual union, but this, they assert, can be obtained by fervently asking for it.
8. The principle occupation of the Sufi whilst in the body, is meditation on the *wahdaniyah*, or unity of God, the remembrance of God's names (*zikr*), and progressive advancement in the *tariqah*, or journey of life, so as to attain unification with God.

#### The Sufi Journey

According to Thomas Patrick Hughes, for the Sufis Human life is likened to a journey (*Safar*) and the seeker after God to a traveller (*salik*).

The great business of the traveller is to exert himself and strive to attain that perfect knowledge (*marifa*) of God which is diffused through all things, for the soul of man is an exile from its Creator, and human existence is its period of banishment. The sole object of Sufism is to lead the wondering soul onward, stage by stage, until it reaches the desired goal-perfect union with the Divine Being.

The natural state of every human being is humanity (*nasut*), in which state the disciple must observe the Law (*sharia*); but as this is the lowest form of spiritual existence, the performance of the journey is enjoined upon every searcher after true knowledge.

The various stages (*manzil*) are differently described by Sufi writers, but amongst those of India (and, according to Malcom, of Persia also) the following is the usual journey:-

The first stage, as we have already remarked, is humanity (*nasut*), in which the desciple must live according to the Law (*Sharia*), and observe all the rites, customs, and precepts of his religion. The second is the nature of angels (*malakut*), for which there is the pathway of purity (*tariqah*). The third is the possession of power (*jubrut*), for which there is knowledge (*marifah*); and the fourth is extinction (*fana*) (i.e. absorption into the Deity), for which there is Truth (*haqiqah*)<sup>812</sup>

**Surma:** a kind of collyrium for men normally used on the occasion of *ID*.

**Tasbîh:** the prayer-beads.

**Tariqah:** Sufi order. The prominent among the Sufi *tariqahs* that came to India, mention may be made of the Chisti, the Suhrawardi, the Qadiri, and the Naqshavandi.

**Sufism in Action** is characterized by “faith, practices, humility, gratitude, poverty, patience and generosity.”

**Taka:** Bangladeshi unit of currency. The name derived from the Iranian word *tonka*, the Iranian currency introduced during the Delhi Sultanate.

**Ulama:** literally means “the learned”, the Muslim religious teacher, theologian, and expert on Islamic Law. Fazlur Rahman says that historically the “Ulama” were state functionaries since they were in charge of the execution of this Law. In the popular mind, therefore the Ulama and the Islam they stood for were necessarily “allies” of the state. **Source:** Thomas Patrick Hughes, Dictionary of Islam, (Karamat Sheikh in Kuwait: Safat, 1978), pp. 608-609.

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**Wahabis:** The followers of the orthodox Muslim religious leader Abdul Wahab of Saudi Arabia.

***Za'lim*** means oppressor.

**Zamindari system:** The British conquered Bengal in 1757. In 1793 it introduced the ownership of land by the transfer of property rights to individuals who could buy blocks of land from the British. This is done by an act called the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. It was the beginning of the *zamindari* system.

During this time urban Hindus working with the East India company officials began to prosper while Muslims started to degenerate. This allowed Hindus to buy land ownership from the British. Sometimes by forgery Muslim ownerships were denied. A case in point often pointed out by Bhasani was the ownership of Santosh (previously known as Khoshnampur) obtained by the Hindu *zamindar* from a philanthropist *pir* named Khan Jhan Ali. Santosh was a waqf property. By trickery, the title of the deed was transferred to a Hindu *zamindar*. As a consequence of widespread discrimination by the East India Company Hindus became the property owners especially in Bengal. *Zamindari* system caused great suffering among Bengali peasants and was abolished in 1950.

**Zindabad:** To appreciate a leader through unusual flattery.

***Zul'm*** means oppression.